UNDER ONE STANDARD

H. LOUISA BEDFORD.

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DAVID, LIFTING HIS CAP, BROKE INTO A CHEER.

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UNDER ONE STANDARD

OR

THE TOUCH THAT MAKES US KIN

A Story of the Time of the Maori War

BY

H. LOUISA BEDFORD

AUTHOR OF

"A HOME IN THE BUSH," "JACK THE ENGLISHMAN," ETC.

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UNDER ONE STANDARD

CHAPTER I

A BOLT FROM THE BLUE

"IT'S an important decision, Abel."

"Yes;" but Abel Godwin's tone and the determined set of his square jaw left little doubt on the mind of his young wife that the decision was already made and in the affirmative.

For the first time in their short married life Mary Godwin felt inclined to question her husband's judgment, for the matter he was dismissing in such summary fashion was none other than the uprooting of their home in the old country and sailing over unknown seas to establish another in New Zealand. The letter which suggested this great change had only arrived that morning, and now before the sun had set Abel had made up his mind to go.

The time of which we write was nearly fifty years ago, before the great ocean steamers had

resolved communication with the other side of the world into an easy five or six weeks' voyage. Then a trip to New Zealand implied four months on the sea in a sailing vessel, when week after week would pass with never a sight of land, and all communication with the old world and the new was completely cut off, an experience which none who have not tried it may fully understand. No wonder gentle Mary's heart failed her at the suddenness and greatness of the undertaking.

"You'll sleep upon it, Abel?" she pleaded.

"I think not, dear. Ever since our marriage I have felt stuck in a hole, with no hope of climbing out of it. This offer seems like the ladder which will help us to reach independence, and, please God, prosperity."

"But David's fortune is involved as well as our own."

"A boy of fourteen should have a better chance in the new world than in the old," said Abel, a little impatiently. "He shall have the offer of coming with us, and if he does not like it when he gets there, he can at any time work his passage back again."

"Will Uncle Peter be very angry?" and there was a quiver in Mary's voice. "Do you think it's quite right to leave him when he's getting old, and has neither wife nor child to look after him? You fill the place of son to him."

"A servant rather! Else how should he suffer it, that I, his heir, should occupy the posi-

tion of working bailiff on the farm that will one day be my own; that you, a lady born and bred, should begin life in a cottage and lead the life of an ordinary working woman?"

"That need not trouble you. I'm a very happy woman! How can I help it, being, as I am, your wife?" And Mary's sweet eyes were lifted to her husband's troubled face.

"If on my marriage he had treated you differently, offered us a home at the Holt, and given you your proper position as mistress, then there could never have been a question of deserting him; but now with a month's notice, he will have no difficulty in getting another bailiff. He may have to give him higher wages than mine, for there is a steady rise now in labourers' wages all through the country, but my place can easily be filled."

"And you will forfeit every chance of ever possessing the farm?"

"Yes, I have thought of that; but, after all, what more hateful position can one be in than waiting for a dead man's shoes, more especially when the very presence of the man for whose death you wait becomes daily more intolerable? And it's Uncle Peter's own brother who offers me the start in New Zealand. Well, I must not go on talking. There is the seven acre being carried to-day, and I must go out and give a hand."

Contrary to her usual custom Mary did not

set herself to work when her husband left her. She lingered in the doorway, looking with wistful eyes on the lovely view which it framed. In the distance a soft outline of hills, clothed almost to their summits by trees, which already were beginning to hang out signals of the gorgeous autumn hues of crimson, russet, and yellow, which would reach their full beauty in a few weeks' time; and at the foot of the hills nestled Plymouth, the only town of any size with which Mary Godwin was intimate, and shimmering in the afternoon sunshine were the waters of the bay, where ships from many lands lay peacefully at anchor.

Those ships as they came and went had been Mary's chief connection with the outside world. In fancy she had often pictured herself voyaging in one of them to some fair distant land, but it had never been one of her ambitions that her fancy should become fact.

Mary was a Devonshire lass, born and bred, the only daughter of the clergyman of the village where she still lived as Abel Godwin's wife. She had been very happy managing her father's house and ministering to the wants of the villagers; but her cup of happiness was full to overflowing when Abel Godwin, a yeoman of very old family, whom she had known from girlhood, asked her to become his wife. The engagement promised to be a long one, for Mary was only twenty and Abel twenty-three, but the wholly unexpected death of her father had thrown her and her young brother

almost penniless upon the world, and it was natural that Abel should urge a speedy marriage and insist that David Copeland should share the home; but Peter Godwin could not forgive an action so rash and imprudent.

"The lad's a fool," he said, speaking of his nephew; "he might have had his choice of any farmer's daughter in the country side, for he's a fine, upstanding man to look at. There's many a lass with big, strong hands for work and money in her pocket that would not have said him nay. Instead, he's thrown himself away on this yellow-haired, white-handed girl, with nothing to commend her but her smile."

"But some men might think that and her dimples worth a king's ransom," said Peter Godwin's crony, who had clearly succumbed to its witchery. "They say she could have looked higher!"

"Tut! tut!" cried Peter, purpling with anger. "She'd have done it if she could. Women are all alike; they go to the highest bidder."

It was rumoured that in youth old Peter had made his bid for a girl and lost her, and that the man who had been preferred before him was the younger brother, who was now a well-to-do settler in New Zealand. However that may be, Peter's friend wisely let the subject drop.

Having thus steadfastly set his face against Abel's choice of a wife, it did not please the crotchety old man that his judgment of her

should prove itself false. It riled him that often as he rode by he heard her singing like a lark over her work, that the white hands seemed as capable as if they had been big and red, that household matters were carried on with such despatch that by the afternoon Mary could lock up the house, and clad in her pretty wedding gowns could visit her friends, poor or rich, like any lady of leisure. At first she would drop in at the Holt, trying to charm Uncle Peter's surliness out of him; but as the topic of conversation on which Peter waxed eloquent was the iniquity of his nephew's adopting a ready-made son before he had the necessary means for supporting a wife, Mary's patience succumbed, and her visits were discontinued. The tenderest spot in Mary's heart was, perhaps, reserved for the brother of fourteen, to whom she had acted the part of mother and eldest sister all in one. It was in obedience to her wish that the little money he and she had, was employed in sending David to the best boys' school Plymouth afforded. The boy was clever and ambitious, determined to make his own way in the world, and Mary was sure that, given a good education, he would not have much difficulty in doing it. It was the thought of the boy's uprooting as well as her own that gave her eyes such a peculiarly wistful expression as she stood where Abel had left her, waiting for the sound of the pony's hoofs which was the signal of David's return from Plymouth

every afternoon. She could often hear them half a mile away. Yes, there it was drawing ever nearer and nearer, and for the first time in her life Mary found no pleasure in the sound. It only brought the moment nearer when she must divulge the change of home to David, and she knew beforehand how unwelcome the news would be.

"Hullo, Mary!" David shouted, as he came galloping round the corner. "Is tea ready? I am as hungry as a hunter, and as happy. I'm the head of the form, and old Benham patted me on the shoulder and said, if I went on as I'm doing now, I'm safe for a scholarship by the time I'm seventeen, and that means University, and then—I can be almost anything I like. I'm going to work jolly hard, I can tell you."

The boy's handsome face was aglow with excitement as he slipped the saddle from the pony and turned him loose into the paddock close by. It was not until he was seated at the table that he noticed that Mary had made no comment on his news, and that the hand that handed him his tea trembled a little.

"I thought you'd be glad," he said.

"So I am, Davie, glad and sorry together. It's no use making plans that you mayn't be able to carry out."

"What's to hinder? Unless I break my neck, like Humpty-Dumpty," said David, merrily.

"What if we should leave the country?"

"Why should we leave it?" David answered, reddening. "Abel *must* be a fixture, because the farm will be his some day."

"He has had a good offer from his uncle, Jacob Godwin, in New Zealand, which would enable him to start farming there, and I think he has decided to accept it."

"And must we go too?" David asked drearily.

Mary smiled faintly. "I certainly must; you forget that I'm his wife; and if you stayed behind, dear, you might just make your living perhaps by working on a farm or in an office; but your education would have to be given up just the same. And oh, David, I don't think I can part from you just yet, not until you are older. Some boys would be glad of the chance."

"Not if their chance came this side of the world instead of the other. I suppose there is not money enough to keep me and pay for my schooling until I could get to college? I know it's beastly selfish even to suggest such a thing, but it might make a difference for all my life."

Mary choked back her disappointment. "I'm afraid I must use what is left of mine to help Abel with the expense of the move, and yours would not pay for your school fees until you were seventeen, let alone your keep."

David pushed back his chair from the table, leaving the meal almost untouched. Mary saw

the knot in his throat climb up as if it would choke him.

"Then it's no use making a row! At present it's a facer, and no mistake."

"To me too, David," said his sister, piteously. "I've never been out of Devonshire in my life, and I don't want to go;" and to David's entire dismay, the sister who never cried broke into helpless sobbing.

He slipped his arm a little awkwardly round her neck, venturing expostulation.

"Oh, I say, if Abel saw you now he'd chuck it, wouldn't he?"

"But he doesn't see me, and he shall never know," said Mary, bravely wiping away her tears. "After all, if we go it's sure to turn out for the best."

"That's what people say about everything that's horrid, and this is horrid. We both feel it is, and if I get the chance of coming back again, I shall take it when I'm old enough."

Then David took up his cap and sauntered out, too sore at heart to set to work at his evening lessons.

"I think I must let my uncle know my decision to-night," Abel said to his wife after supper that evening. "Our preparations must begin at once, for I find that the brig, *Duchess of Leinster*, sails on September 25, and I must make inquiries about our passages to-morrow."

"I'll come with you if you'll give me time to put on my hat."

"The interview is likely to be a stormy one; you had better not face it."

"Less stormy if a woman is present," Mary said smiling. "I have not been out to-day."

Once started on their walk with the west still aglow from the sunset, and the wind from the sea fresh in her face, a calm fell on Mary's troubled spirit. Her hand rested in her husband's arm, and, after all, nothing mattered whilst she had him by her side, and even the sight of the beautiful old farmhouse, the Holt, which she had thought of timidly as her future home, only filled her with a momentary regret. It was especially picturesque in the evening light with its stacks of twisted chimneys, its red-tiled roof, and strong grey walls, up which creepers climbed in unpruned luxuriance.

A bevy of barking dogs flew to the open door as they advanced slowly up the flagged pathway which led to it, and Peter Godwin's stalwart form could be descried seated in an elbow-chair in the hall. He was reading the paper whilst he smoked his pipe, and greeted his visitors with a nod, not troubling himself to rise.

"Come in and seat yourselves, will you? Nothing wrong with the farm, eh, Abel?"

"No; the seven acre is stacked, and the ten acre will be carried to-morrow if the weather keeps steady, and there is no sign of change."

There was an awkward pause. No sound could be heard but the regular puff of Peter's

pipe, and the ticking of the grandfather clock in the corner.

"Then I expect you want something, for it's seldom you look me up at this late hour. Money perhaps?" with keen question in the sharp grey eyes.

"No, not money," Abel said. "The truth is, we've made up our minds to-day that we'll try our fortune on the other side of the world. I've a good opening there, and not much here but to remain a working bailiff for the best years of my life, so I've pretty well decided to go. It only seemed right to let you know at once, so that you could look out a suitable man to fill my place, as we must book our passages for New Zealand."

"Which pack o' nonsense means that you want a rise of wages," said old Peter, with insolent composure.

"No, sir," said Abel, quietly; "it means exactly what I have said, neither more nor less. We want you to take our notice for this day month."

"You must have feathered your nest pretty well, with all your whining about being a poor man, when you talk composedly of moving yourself and family to the other side of the world, and setting up farming on your own account. That means capital—your own or some other man's."

"Uncle Jacob has promised an advance,"

Abel said; but Mary's warning pressure on his arm told him that he had blundered.

Peter Goldwin's cynical calm broke up in a perfect storm of swearing.

"He is well called Jacob! He's never lost an opportunity of supplanting me. He's no better than a thief! First—first——" the blank was left unfilled, "and now you. He's a confounded underhand scoundrel."

The stormy outburst which awaked in Abel nothing but disgust, filled Mary with an infinite pity. She went swiftly across the hall and knelt by the old man's chair.

"If you feel like that, if you want us so badly, we will stay, Uncle Peter. It's because Abel has been feeling that you did not care for him, that he was nothing more to you than one of your other workmen, that he decided to go away. But can't we begin afresh from to-night? Can't you trust him and let him be a son to you, and me a daughter, to look after you and make you as happy as I can?"

A curious struggle fought itself out in the rugged features: hesitation, regret, a half yielding to the constraining gentleness of the pleader, and then a hardening of the heart, like Pharaoh of old, which resulted in suspicion of Mary's motive.

"Ah! you know which side your bread is buttered," he said, with a return of his usual manner. "You know that if once you got your

foot in here, it would be for good. A few more years, and you'd be mistress here for always. You might have been, but you won't be now. Abel there can look to the man who's so ready to advance him money! No, no; I'll take your notice and get hold of a better man very likely. I suppose that brother of yours will be left at home to waste time and money over Latin and Greek?"

"No," Mary said quietly; "he must come with me. He only has me to look after him."

"That's the way of you. I offered him work on the farm, and you refused without so much as a thank you; but when it comes to wanting the boy's help yourself, his book learning may go to the winds."

Abel rose with a muttered exclamation. Insults to himself he was used to and could endure, but to sit by and hear his wife gibed at was simply intolerable.

"I should not have kept my hands off him much longer," he said, when they were fairly outside the door. "For good or ill the venture is made, Mary. There is no drawing back."

"I could bear the going, but it's sad to leave ill blood behind us."

And Peter sat on in the gathering dusk, his pipe still held between his lips, although it had gone out, his head sunk on his breast, and in his heart a simmering purpose of revenge. Abel should be disinherited that was certain, and it could be carried out to-morrow by a stroke of the

pen; but, perhaps, nothing proved the utter loneliness of the old man more convincingly than the fact that there was no one he could put in Abel's place, not a single man that he wished to inherit the family acres that had belonged to Godwins for generations past. Suddenly he straightened himself, laid his empty pipe on the table, and brought down his hand with mighty force upon his knee.

"I'll do it, that 'ull sting if nothing else will; it 'ull be sharper than a serpent's tooth if I persuade young David to stop. She loves him as well, if not better, than that pig-headed husband of hers," he said aloud, with a chuckle.

Very much to David's astonishment, Peter Godwin waylaid him the following afternoon as he rode in from Plymouth.

"So I hear you've made up your mind to go and work on a farm the other side of the world, although you would have none of it here."

David smiled a little ruefully. "I would not go if I could help it," he said unguardedly.

A gleam of pleasure dawned in Peter's eyes; he glanced cautiously round him.

"Come along with me, lad," and he opened a gate which led to the farm. "I've something to say to you, an offer to make which may surprise you. Your people have made up their minds to leave me, and they can go for aught I care. You want to stay. Well, you may think I've not shown myself very friendly to you thus

far, but I fancy you're a lad with some backbone. I've been into Plymouth to-day and seen your master, and he says there's grit in you, that you'll do well, so I'll put it to you straight. You can stay with me, if you choose. I don't ask you to give up your books yet. You can go to school a year or two longer, and then you must turn your brains to some practical account, keep my books, and help to manage the place. That's my offer, fair and square. It mayn't be the calling you like best, but if you behave yourself it's a certainty. You can bring your brains to bear on land as well as anything else."

David's colour came and went; he had come to a standstill, and stood leaning against the pony, from which he had dismounted, with eyes fixed on old Peter in which curiosity and surprise were written rather than gratitude.

"I don't understand, sir. Why should you make this offer to me?"

"Because I want some one I can count on to come after me, some one I can train to manage as I have managed, some one who'd see that those who have despised and spurned me should never set foot inside the door of the Holt nor live on an acre of land belonging to it. The Holt that has had Godwins in it for the last three hundred years would change hands, and any Godwin who came there would be a trespasser. I've wiped my hands of the lot, and you would do the same if I made you my heir."

David understood quite clearly now.

"You mean that you'd kick out Abel and put me here in his stead, if I'd cut all connection with him and with my sister."

Peter nodded, and David sprang on to his pony lifting his cap.

"Then you don't know my sister and you don't know me. There's not a woman anywhere like Mary, and I would not give her up for a fortune. Besides, I'd be a sneak to round on Abel, who's given me a home, and slip into his shoes. Good night, sir," and before Abel could answer the boy was gone.

CHAPTER II

ADRIFT ON THE WATERS

IT was the evening before the *Duchess of Leinster* was to sail, and Mary Godwin was bidding a final farewell to the little home, which, in spite of poverty, had grown very dear to her. It was but an empty shell at present, for the possessions which had made it so pretty were all dispersed: some packed and on board the brig, and the rest sold. To-day Mary's business had been to polish the casket which had held her household gods to an exceeding brightness.

The whole place was redolent of soap, the windows shone like diamonds in the setting sun, and it was with pardonable pride that she took a final look round before she locked the door for the last time. Presently the key must be handed to its rightful owner, Uncle Peter. She had not spoken to him since the night of his fierce ebullition of temper, when he heard of her husband's intended departure, but she could not leave the country without wishing him good-bye.

Of the old man's proposal to make David his heir Mary knew nothing; the incident was closed, and the boy's generous instinct told him that it was wiser not to trouble his sister about the matter; but even if Mary had known the story, it would scarcely have turned her purpose of seeing Uncle Peter once more. But, first, she had a sweeter, tenderer farewell, to take of the church in which she had worshipped since she could lisp the Lord's Prayer, and she climbed with quick, light steps up the steep stony lane which led to it. It was an old weather beaten church, untouched by the hand of the restorer, but its doors always stood open, inviting those who would to enter, and Mary crept in quietly and knelt for a few minutes in the place where for years past it had been her custom to lay before the great God the simple joys and sorrows of her daily life. To-night, with face buried in her hands, she asked His blessing and guidance on the journey to the country so far away. Abel's name and David's found a place in her prayers and then she paused.

"God bless poor Uncle Peter, and help him to forgive us," she whispered.

Then she rose and passed out into the churchyard, standing for a moment by the side of two graves where her father and mother rested. Their journey had ended almost before her own had begun, she thought, and they were so safe, so safe in the very presence of Him where was

fulness of joy. She bent down and passed her hand tenderly, caressingly over the grassy mounds, then turned to find Uncle Peter watching her with a derisive smile. The pathway through the churchyard was a short cut to the farm, and he had come towards her unobserved. She coloured a little, and putting her hand into her pocket drew out the key of the cottage.

"I was coming to bring you this," she said.

"Then I'll take it and save you the further walk," Peter said with answering brevity.

Mary drew a step nearer. "I wanted also to say good-bye, and please, please—don't think of us unkindly."

"I shan't think of you at all; I've washed my hands of you," said Peter, roughly. "Had you been content to wait, you might have stroked my grave before long, and Abel would have stepped into the shoes he's so impatient to fill."

Mary looked at him through a mist of tears. "I did not covet the farm. What I wanted was to win your love, but I've failed somehow, and I am sorry. Good-bye, Uncle Peter;" and to his utter astonishment and greater dismay, Peter felt the soft touch of lips on his cheek, but open remonstrance was useless. Mary had gone.

"Confound her impudence!" he said, brushing the spot with his coat sleeve. "How dare the hussy kiss me?" and then he burst into a vexed laugh.

But that kiss which he had tried to brush off

set him musing that night as he sat smoking his lonely pipe. It was five and twenty years since any woman had kissed him. Then he had looked forward to a wife of his own, and children perhaps to cheer his declining years. He was vexed with himself that instead of being able to centre his mind on the gains or losses of the day, the chances of fair weather to-morrow, and the work that was most urgent on the farm, his mind would only revert to the story of long ago which he had flattered himself was dead and buried. The girl's hair was much the same colour as Mary's, he could even see again the lilac spot on her gown which fell in pretty folds as far as her comely ankles, and from beneath which her neatly shod feet had peeped out. And she had kissed him on the cheek, just as Mary had done, when she told him, with brimming eyes, that she could not marry him, that she loved some one else. That was the last, almost the only time, a woman had kissed him, until to-day, and this also was a farewell. Scarcely to his own heart would the obstinate old man own that he had made a great mistake in not yielding to Mary's offer to come and look after him in his old age. Now if he were ill—or dying—who would nurse him or look after his interests? Here his meditations were broken by his favourite dog, who, as if aware of his master's unusual depression, laid his great head on his knee and looked up into his face with eyes melting with faithfulness.

"Hullo! Jock, old man," said Peter, aloud. "After all, you're the best friend I have. Cross or kind, it's all the same to you. You'll stick by me to the end, eh?" and he fondled the creature's head with a tenderness which the memory of a woman long since passed out of his life had evoked.

Next morning he was out earlier than usual on the farm. Abel had gone, the new bailiff had not come; it was needful that the master's eye should be everywhere. Already several things had gone wrong; an unlatched gate had allowed cattle to stray into a crop of mangel-wurzel, and it took Peter and Jock a good half-hour to get them out; a valuable machine was left in the open instead of being drawn under cover; on every hand could be seen the need of the conscientious care which Abel had bestowed upon the farm. Apart from all sentiment, Peter felt that he had been foolish to let the young couple go. He was crossing a field lying high on the hill commanding a beautiful view of the bay. Peter remembered that this was the day when the *Duchess of Leinster* was to sail, and, turning, he shaded his eyes with his hand to see if he could distinguish the brig from the many other ships anchored in the bay. There was little difficulty in finding her, for, although too far away to see any name, there could be no doubt that the ship whose sails were just swelling with the breeze was the brig already started on her

long journey. Her deck was crowded with passengers waving handkerchiefs to the watchers on shore, and, seized by an unaccountable impulse, Peter took out his own red-spotted one and waved in sympathy. It was but for one brief moment; the next he shoved it back into his coat pocket, and held it there crushed in his hand.

"My wits must be going; I'm nothing better than a doited old fool," he said. But his red signal had carried its message of comfort to Mary on board the brig.

"Abel, somebody waved a red handkerchief from the high field. I'm certain it was Uncle Peter," she said, grasping her husband's arm; but Abel only answered with an incredulous smile.

At half-past one that day Esther, Peter Godwin's housekeeper, hurried across the farmyard to the big barn, where several of the labourers who lived at a distance were wont to dine.

"Hast seen anything of the master?" she said. "He's not come back to his dinner."

"Seen him and heard him too," grumbled one of the men. "He's put hisself out somethin' awful 'cause the beasts have strayed in them wurzels, and he's sweared hisself hoarse. Where he's got to now I don't know, and he may be dead for aught I care."

"You're a wicked man, Hill," Esther retorted. She had a soft place in her heart for the master,

who "ate his vittles regular" and paid her wage the moment it was due. "One of you had best go in search of him; in the twenty years I've served him he's never been late for a meal."

"Time enough to search when we's done our dinner," chuckled another. "Two o'clock 'ull bring him safe enough to see as we're back at work," and the remark was greeted with a chorus of laughter.

Esther flung away, but not back to the house. She was seriously uneasy about the fate of the man whose habits were as regular as clockwork. She would not deign to ask where the men had last seen him, but took her way across a field of stubble towards the wurzels that had been spoken of. Perhaps the master had gone round there again to consider the full extent of the damage. He was a rare one to worry. There, stretched at full length in the September sunshine, she found him, his hand still grasping his stick, his mouth fast shut, his eyes wide and expressionless.

Esther in her terror did not wait to find out whether he were dead or living. Help she must have, and that instantly, and she flew back to the barn as fast as her legs could carry her. The scared look of her, the struggle for speech, told the men that something was wrong, and they rose to their feet.

"What is it, Esther, old girl? Hast lost thy tongue?" asked one, not unkindly.

"Dead! that's the matter; lying out there

with Jock alongside of him, close to the field of wurzels. Go and fetch him, some of you, whilst I get ready for him in the house."

This was not the time for tears or reproaches, Esther felt, as she staggered on to the farmhouse. She issued quick, sharp orders to the maid under her to get the master's room ready at once.

"Do what I tell you, and don't ask no questions," she said, with a catch in her throat, when the girl's round eyes and open-mouthed ejaculation betrayed her astonishment at the unusualness of the command.

She bustled about as she spoke, raked the fire together, and filling the kettle put it on to boil, conscious that the only chance of retaining her self-control lay in activity.

The sound of regular tramping feet, and a shriek from the room above, where the girl was busy carrying out her orders, put the last strain upon her overwrought feelings. Lucy, the young servant, came rushing down the staircase.

"I can't bide there alone, Esther; it's no good your telling me to. I hear a funeral coming. I dursn't for the life of me look out of the window, but it's the tramp, tramp of men carrying a coffin," she said, throwing herself into a chair and sobbing hysterically.

Esther seized her by the shoulders and shook her into silence.

"It's a funeral or a fit, Lucy—we don't know which at present; but it's the master the men are

bringing home, and instead of sobbing and making a noise, we've got to see what we can do to bring him back to life, if life there is in him, or to lay him out decent if there isn't; so you must behave yourself, or I'll shake you again. There's nothing like shaking for hystrycks! I'm not blamin' you, girl. I was took like it myself once when I was a girl."

The drastic treatment had due effect, and Lucy, with faint intermittent sobs, bestirred herself, only running away to hide for the few awful minutes when her master was carried up to the room she had got ready for him.

A faint spark of colour had returned to Esther's cheeks when she came down presently to fetch something.

"He's not dead, Lucy; it's a fit of sorts," she said. "We shall know better when the doctor comes. One of the men has gone for him. Meanwhile run and draw some beer for those as carried him home. Pray God the doctor will come quick!"

But does ever doctor come quickly enough for waiting ears? The hour that intervened between her master's being carried home and the doctor's arrival was indeed a long one to the faithful Esther, and very grave was the good man's face when he came down from the sick-room.

"Is it death, sir?" Esther asked, clasping her hands to keep them quiet.

"I could almost wish it were," the doctor

answered sadly. "Poor fellow! it's just paralysis that has felled him down, and he has such a strong constitution that he may last for years, but he will never have his proper brain-power again. You must get some one to nurse him."

"Meaning me, sir," said Esther. "Master's never had any one else about him; and never will;" and the doctor felt that affection would atone for want of skill.

CHAPTER III

AN OCEAN FOUNDLING

A WEEK had passed since the *Duchess of Leinster* had weighed anchor. Her passengers, some dozen in number, were beginning to settle down to the monotonous life on board which possessed none of the interests of a modern sea voyage. Mary Godwin sat quietly sewing in a sheltered corner, giving her husband a smile from time to time as he paced up and down in earnest converse with a young colonist, Herbert Folkes by name, who was returning to New Zealand after a business visit to England. David, sick and sorry for himself, squatted in an out-of-the-way nook with a heap of books before him. The weather had been exceptionally rough and boisterous since starting, and the poor boy had lain in his bunk more dead than alive, creeping upon deck for the first time this morning, desperately ashamed of his white face and shaking legs, fearing, boy-like, that his sea-sickness might be attributed to mere "funk!" He was in no

mood for study, but a certain dogged determination not to lose the little learning he had made him try to fix his attention on his books, but his usually alert brain seemed dull; the words danced before his eyes, conveying no definite meaning. Book after book was tried, then laid aside with an impatient sigh; finally he laid back his head upon his upstretched arms, and his eyes scanned the grey horizon. It was a gloomy day, and the tossing waves had caught the leaden hue of the clouds above them. Small wonder that David's thoughts, too, were sombre—full of regret for the life he was leaving behind him and the collapse of his ambitions. The untried life before him on the other side of the world possessed no fascination for him, as it would have done to many boys. David was older than his years, a boy of strong purpose and character, and having sketched out one career for himself, he could not easily adjust his ideas to another. The rhythm of the regular tramp of Abel and his companion as they walked up and down formed a kind of accompaniment to his thoughts, until fragments of their conversation, a phrase here and there, arrested his attention, and broke up his somewhat morbid introspection.

"Unsettled state of the country"—"general rising of the Maoris."

David turned his head to get a more clear view of the speaker.

It was Herbert Folkes who was the chief talker. Abel, with hands clasped behind his

back, and head bent forward in eager attention, only kept the ball of conversation rolling by an occasional question or word of assent. And first David considered the personality of the speaker, noting his broad shoulders and splendid height with approval, as also his clear brown eyes and strong square jaw. He could not be more than five and twenty, but he was talking with the decision and earnestness of a man of fifty, and clearly impressed Abel with the feeling that he knew what he was talking about. It must be New Zealand that was in such an unsettled state, and the Maoris David summarily dismissed from his mind as the nigger tribe that infested the country. But of this country he suddenly became aware he knew absolutely nothing, and rousing himself from his half-recumbent posture, he opened the atlas he had brought up with him, turning over its leaves to look at the map of the land towards which he was travelling. It was a wholly inadequate representation, and David decided that it must be a very "one-horse" kind of place, stuck out in the ocean months away from all civilized countries. He found much more interest in studying the fellow-passenger, whose outer man was very attractive. Abel had joined his wife, and Folkes pursued his walk by himself, whistling softly the while. Presently he became conscious of the bright dark eyes that watched his movements, and came to a halt, looking down on David with a kindly smile.

"Well, I must say you are the very first boy I have ever seen trying to do lessons on board ship, and you don't look very fit for it either. What's this? Geography, is it? Ah!"—glancing down at the open atlas—"that's just about the average value of the map of the English colonies that English schoolmasters think good enough to put before their boys;" and he seated himself by David's side, turning over its leaves with a quick hand. "No, there's nothing better! Just for curiosity's sake I should very much like to know what you've been taught about New Zealand. I want to discover if your education was conducted on the same lines as my own. I found they had taught me all the things that were no particular use!"

The laugh that accompanied the question was a merry one.

"I don't think I know anything of New Zealand but its name, and that a fellow called Cook discovered it," David said, smiling back.

"But he didn't; a Dutchman called Tasman discovered it, and gave it its name of New Zealand out of compliment to the Zealand in Europe, just as the place you are bound for, New Plymouth, gets its name from all the people who are going out to colonize her."

"I'm not," declared David. "I'm not going to be a settler."

"What, then?" questioned his companion, with some amusement.

"I dare say you think it all nonsense, but I am going back to England the first chance I get."

"The more fool you! New Zealand is the place for a boy to start, as I found when I went out there at seventeen. I only came to England because I had business to see to, and now I am as happy as a sand-boy to find myself on the way back."

"Really!" cried David, "and I hate it so."

Folkes threw back his head with a laugh, showing two even rows of white teeth.

"A good joke that! So like a Britisher to hate what he knows nothing of. New Zealand is not England, and therefore to be hated!"

His bantering tone was so entirely good-humoured that David could only join in the laugh against himself.

"Tell me some more about it then, and see if I hate it less," David said, and Folkes, opening the map, again told him rapidly something of the islands, their beauty, the roughness of the sea around their coasts, and the wonderful advantages it offered to enterprising colonists.

"Cook did much for us when he claimed it for the English king, and he was only just in time. The French tried to get an innings. Every cape and bay almost gets its name from him, even Mount Egmont, the extinct volcano, which is the crowning beauty of New Plymouth. On clear days it looks as if you could touch it,

and it's twenty miles away. There it is," pointing to it on the map, "but he has not got his name."

David was getting interested. "I wonder if there is any one who remembers Captain Cook's coming. Those nigger chaps live to a tremendous age sometimes, don't they?"

"Maoris aren't niggers," said Folkes. "They are a very fine dark race, recklessly brave, a regular fighting lot, and 'cute enough for anything. I think Governor Wynyard, our last governor, told some tale of an old chief, Taniwha, who, as a tiny boy, could remember Cook's two vessels entering the Hauraki Gulf, and the tremendous alarm they created. At first the Maoris thought them two white-winged birds bearing goblins, and the guns were regarded as walking-sticks that spat fire."

"Are you chaffing?" asked David, incredulously.

"I'm not; I'm passing on the tale as it was told to me. In time the natives began to get over their terror, and carried on trading with the white men, and one day Captain Cook invited Taniwha and some of his companions on board the ship, and they called him 'Tino Tangatu,' *very* man, satisfied at last that he was not a spirit. Taniwha declared that he quite well remembered Captain Cook's taking him down into his cabin, and that his head just reached to the table. The captain fed him with biscuits, but the gift which gave him distinction amongst his fellows was a

large nail, which he treasured for years, using it as a spear-head, or augur, wearing it when not in use as a charm round his neck. He was sad beyond words when he capsized in his canoe and lost the precious nail, and although he dived after it, it was never recovered."

"I wonder if he's alive now. I should just love to meet him."

"I don't think it's possible that he can be. He must have been nearly a hundred years old. They say he was a fine old fellow, with hair as long and white as a sheep."

"Can you talk Maori?" David asked.

"Pretty fairly; I lived near Auckland for the first few years when I went out, and the Bishop taught me all I know of the language. I was constantly in his company."

"What bishop?" questioned David.

"Selwyn; it's not likely that you would know much about him; but, unless I'm much mistaken, in fifty years time every English schoolboy will be pretty familiar with his name."

"Why?" David said laconically.

"Because he's a man first and a bishop afterwards, leading one of those quietly heroic lives, the full power of which will not be generally understood until he is dead and gone. But it is the manliness of him which, speaking from personal experience, must appeal to boys and men. I was scarcely more than a boy when I knew him first, and it was more from what he

was, than what he said, that I began to feel that there must be a good deal more in religion than I had thought."

David looked up quickly; it was on the tip of his tongue to ask just what his companion meant by his words, but he was too shy.

"Then does the Bishop teach the Maori fellows?" he said.

"I should rather think he did. Hundreds of them are better Christians than many Englishmen."

"But I thought you told Abel just now that you thought there would be a rising among the natives. I could not help hearing what you said, and if they are Christians and all that, they ought not to want to fight."

Folkes turned upon him with a sunny smile. "Poor fellows, they will only fight for their rights, or what they believe to be their rights. I am a little afraid we are muddling things out there. It's a question of land, you see. Some of the Maoris want to sell to us, and some want to keep it, and it is very difficult for us to know whose rights we are infringing. That is one reason, among many, that makes me anxious to get some appointment on the land survey at New Plymouth, and I am fully qualified now. Knowing something of the language, and a good deal of the natives, I am able, at any rate, to see both sides of the question. I wonder if during the voyage you would care to learn what I can teach you of

Maori? It's an offer I would not dare to make to most boys of your age for fear of boring them, but you seem fond of learning things."

"I am," said David, simply; "and I meant to learn a lot more if I'd stayed at home."

"Well, there are lots of things you can learn now, if you like: to climb the rigging, and handle a rope, and to lower a boat, and heaps of other things. It's not only books that teach you."

"Can you do all that?" David asked.

"Of course I can; the Bishop taught me that amongst other things. When shall we begin our lessons? To-morrow?"

"Yes, please," David said; and a summons to dinner ended the conversation.

"What a lot Mr. Folkes had to say to you!" Mary said, as David took his seat beside her at the table.

"Oh, he's stunning! a really all-round chap, you know," said David, eagerly.

From that day forward David followed Folkes about like a faithful dog; and Mary noted gratefully how the boy's devotion to his big friend developed all that was best in his character.

"It's like David and Goliath," she said to her husband, with a little laugh; "only happily in this case Goliath is friendly."

The days passed by, one so exactly like another, that it seemed difficult to credit that they had been nearly three months at sea, when one exquisite sunny morning David sat by his friend

in the rigging. He could go up aloft now as well as any sailor on the ship.

"Look, Davie, there's a black speck on the horizon not much bigger than a bird. Can you see it?" said Folkes, shading his eyes with his hand.

David turned his head in the direction towards which his friend pointed.

"I believe it's a boat," he said.

"I almost think so too; but if so, it's a queer thing for such a small craft to be alone on the sea."

Meanwhile, the captain, too, had caught sight of the object which had arrested their attention, and was holding converse with the mate as to what it might be.

"If a boat, there's trouble behind it," said the captain; "it may be some small vessel that has foundered in a storm, and this is one of her boats very likely."

So, to the great excitement of all on board, the order was given for the brig to change her course a little so as to get nearer the black speck, which might turn out to be a boat in need of assistance.

David and Folkes clambered down from their perch, taking their places beside the rest of the passengers all gathered upon deck, to see the end of the adventure. Before very long, it was established beyond doubt that the speck was a boat, and that a signal of distress in the shape of a red handkerchief was hoisted in its stern, but

apparently no controlling hand guided its course. It was drifting whither it would upon the face of the ocean. Then the brig hove to, and a boat was lowered, and the first mate with three sailors rowed off to the boat of which they were in pursuit. It was not more than half a mile away, and the sea was wonderfully calm, and each dip of the oars was followed in breathless suspense by the watchers on the brig.

"They are there! They've got her, and are bringing her along," cried one of the sailors.

"What is it? What is it? Do you think she's empty?" David said, looking up into Folkes's face, his own white with excitement.

"God only knows; but one thing is certain—it did not start empty. The hoisted handkerchief proves that," he answered gravely.

The two boats were drawing near and David's eyes grew dim. They came so slowly, so slowly; there must be something heavy in the boat that was being towed alongside. Peering over the side of the vessel, it could be seen now that the furthermost boat was not empty. There lay along it a straight, rigid figure, and at his feet a bundle that somehow took the form of a child.

"Any one aboard her?" called the captain.

"Yes, sir," was the answer—"a sailor and a child."

"Alive or dead?"

"Both are dead, sir."

David's head fell forward on his folded arms,

and his frame shook with silent sobs. No tragedy had touched his life before. Mary, down whose gentle face the tears rained fast, touched him softly.

"Come down with me, David. We shall know for certain soon;" and she led him down the companion ladder to the saloon below.

Very soon there came a rumour of hope; the man was dead past all recovery, but the child, a little girl about six years old, still breathed, although she was utterly unconscious. With care and nursing it was hoped she might pull round; and Mary flew off at once to offer her assistance. Miserable and unstrung David wandered restlessly up and down the saloon, until Folkes found him, put his arm in his, and pulled him to a seat.

"It's just too awful!" he said at last, lifting reddened eyes. "Do they think the sailor has been long dead?"

"Not many hours; he was rowing to the last. His hands grasped the oars so tightly they could hardly unclasp them."

"Does it not seem queer that we should not have been in time to save him?"

"I can't tell; it looks as if he had given his life for the child's, than which there could not be a nobler end. Everything warm he had was wrapped round her—*two* sets of clothing, which shows there was another one."

"Dead, too, do you think?" David almost whispered.

"It looks like it; they bury the other poor fellow this afternoon."

So in the sunny silence of the afternoon David stood by bareheaded, whilst in the solemn but beautiful words of the Burial Service, the captain committed the body of the unknown sailor, who had made so fine a finish to his life, to the blue waters of the deep. The simple solemnity of the service sobered David for the rest of the day, but the memory which was to leave an abiding mark upon his character, was that of a man who was ready to sacrifice his life for another, and that a little child. That the child would live was a foregone conclusion in David's mind. God would not refuse the price offered, but he was full of excitement and curiosity about her, and crept on tiptoe many times that day to ask how she fared. She was in high fever and delirious, Mary said—a little English girl. Once David heard her high shrill voice rambling on in short, incoherent sentences, now in terror of the "big, big waves," then dropping into entreaty that she might not go—"she didn't want to go in the weeny boat."

The part of nurse fell naturally to Mary, the only lady amongst the passengers, and for a week the child was too ill to be left by day or night for a single minute; but Mary found strong helpers in Abel and Herbert Folkes, who both insisted in taking turns in watching by the bedside. At last the fever seemed to have run its course, and the little girl waked to semi-consciousness, and

with fever there vanished also all memory of the days of stress and storm that had caused it. With rather painful effort the child could speak, but memory was clouded. She lay in her bunk, obediently taking the nourishment offered her, gazing with solemn eyes at her tender nurses, answering their questions by monosyllables, making no sign of either pleasure or pain.

The captain came and looked pitifully into the white expressionless face.

"Don't you think it would do her good to carry her upon deck?" he said, turning to Mary. "She need not be dressed, we could keep her warm with rugs and blankets."

Mary nodded assent, and the captain gathered the child into his strong, kindly arms, and carrying her on to deck, chose the sunniest, warmest corner, and laid her gently down upon a heap of rugs and cushions.

"It does not seem as if we are to find out where she comes from," he said to Abel Godwin. "Memory may return as the child gets stronger, but at present we have not the slightest clue as to what ship the boat belonged to. There was no name on her."

It almost seemed as if the child's mind had suffered shock from which it could not recover, for day after day she lay upon the deck, petted alike by passengers and crew, but replying to any question put to her only by monosyllables. When asked her name, or where she came from,

her forehead would pucker as if in anxious thought, and, finally, she would shake her head; but the saddest thing of all, the one that grieved Mary's heart, was that she never smiled. Perhaps no one on board tried so hard to win a smile from her as David, who, from the first, had taken such an interest in her welfare. He would turn somersaults before her, whistle tunes, play any kind of trick that might tickle a child's fancy, but it was all in vain. One morning a kitten, born on board and just beginning to stand upon its feet, was brought by David and placed in front of her. In the excitement of trailing the cork tied to a string before the kitten, and watching its futile attempts to capture it, David forgot the child for whose amusement he played off the prank, when a sound of soft laughter fell upon his ear. The string fell from his hand, he pounced upon the kitten and popped it upon the little girl's lap, and, his own face full of smiles, he bent over her.

"Isn't it a funny little pussy? You call it. Let me hear you."

The tiny hands caressed the fluffy ball; a soft voice murmured "Pussy! pussy!"

"Yes," and David's heart beat high as he felt himself upon the verge of a great discovery, "that's pussy's name. Now, can't you tell me yours?"

The little one's lips still smiled. She took one hand and laid it on David's cheek so near her own, stroking it gently.

"Ruby," she said—"they used to call me Ruby."

"Why, what a pretty name. But you must have had another. Ruby what, I wonder?"

But memory had gone; the great eyes filled with tears.

"Just Ruby, nothing else," she persisted; but David, triumphant, ran to fetch his sister.

CHAPTER IV

THE DESIRED HAVEN

THERE seemed poetical justice in the fact that David, who had proved successful in rousing Ruby's memory and laughter, should take the first place in her affections. Physical strength returned by leaps and bounds, and Ruby quickly became the plaything of the whole ship; but after a romp with any other passenger, or a ride on a sailor's back, it was always to David's side that she eventually returned, slipping her hand into his, and sitting by him quite contentedly if he was engaged with his books, or in his daily lesson of Maori. It was during one of these lessons, when Folkes was reading aloud a sentence or two of Maori so that David could catch the exact intonation, that a curious thing happened. Ruby sat as usual close to David, but was not looking at either pupil or tutor. Her eyes were gazing, with a curious faraway look in them, towards the sea, and she was murmuring to

herself as a child occasionally does at play, but Folkes came to a quick stop.

"David," he whispered, "do you hear the child? She is talking Maori. She is repeating the first clauses of the Lord's Prayer."

David slipped his arm round her neck, turning her face to his.

"What were you saying, Ruby? Say it again, will you?"

Ruby's colour came and went, as it had a trick of doing when she was startled or frightened.

"I was not saying anything," she said; and rising quickly, she ran off to Mary at the far end of the deck.

"That shows where she has been brought up," said Folkes, when Ruby was out of hearing. "Poor little mortal! She is probably the child of some New Zealand settler who was returning in that ill-fated ship to the old country."

"But she would not have been sent off alone on the sea with two sailors," argued David. "Father or mother or some one belonging to her would have been in the same boatload."

"Yes, it's one of those mysteries of the sea which I suppose will never be made clear," said Folkes, thoughtfully. "I wonder what will become of her when we arrive at New Plymouth. It's not like the old country. There's no workhouse, no orphanage to which the captain can send her."

David turned rather white. The thought of parting from Ruby had not crossed his mind

before, but it was with him like a nightmare for the rest of the day. It was in his mind that night when he went upon deck for his customary walk up and down before turning into his bunk. The smell of tobacco guided him in the darkness to where Abel leant against the side of the ship, smoking his evening pipe.

"Is that you, David? Isn't it time you were in bed? Lights are turned out at ten, sharp, you'll remember."

"Yes," David said; "but I don't feel sleepy. Abel, have you and Mary thought—has *anybody* thought—what's to become of Ruby when we get to New Plymouth?"

It was a full minute before Abel answered.

"Mary has thought and talked a good deal about it, and for once we are not agreed," he said slowly.

"What does Mary think?" David ventured.

"That we should keep the child."

"You will, won't you?"

"No, David. It seems to me very much like tempting Providence. We don't even know that we can keep ourselves. I was rash in deciding as quickly as I did to throw up my home in England and bringing you all out here. I have heard since I came on board that we may have troublous times; that our land may be disputed, that we may have trouble with the natives. I would not willingly expose Mary to any danger."

"But you brought me with you."

"Yes, because you were too young to leave behind, and Mary's brother is my own brother. I promised that you should be."

"Have I any money left of my own, Abel?"

Abel laughed. "Not much, boy. Fifty pounds at the utmost. Are you in such a desperate hurry to get back? For if you feel like that, I'll put it safely by to let you have your way as soon as you are old enough. It could not be for two or three years yet, but meanwhile you really have to put your shoulder to the wheel and help the cart along. You'll have to work like the rest of us."

"It's not that, Abel. I'm ready for it. I've been making up my mind. Folkes says it may be the best thing that can happen to me, although it's not the thing I like. But couldn't you use the fifty pounds for Ruby? If it's mine, it's mine to give away, isn't it? and a little thing like Ruby couldn't cost very much to keep. I've never thought of things like that before, but wouldn't it pay for her for nearly two years, and then I shall be big and able to earn money for her myself?"

There was a lump in Abel's throat; in the darkness his hand sought David's shoulder and rested there a minute. The ocean foundling was drawing the brothers-in-law together.

"Don't you think you are a little young to adopt a child right off?" Abel asked, with a laugh that was rather close to tears.

"She's fond of me, and not like any one else,"

David said apologetically; "and if I could pay for her, I should not feel mean in asking you to keep her."

"I think the fifty must be laid by as a nest egg for you, David, but if you are prepared to do two men's work, as apparently you are, I will tell Mary we will keep Ruby as long as we have a roof to keep her under. I believe I'm doing a very silly thing, but as you have both set your hearts on it, we must run the risk."

"Oh, Abel, you're an awful brick!" cried David, driven into his most fervid expression of gratitude, combined with admiration. "I'll really try and show you that I'm worth my keep."

So Ruby's fate was settled without more ado; the captain was only too thankful to be helped out of rather an unpleasant predicament, and to the rest of the passengers, who knew nothing of Abel's circumstances, it seemed the most natural thing in the world that such a lovable woman as Mary should want to adopt the pretty little stranger.

For pretty Ruby undoubtedly was, now that health and animation were restored. She had the rather rare combination of very blue eyes, dark lashes, and curly dark hair, which, close cropped in her illness, grew now in a mass of tiny curls all over her head. The general interest in her progress and development shortened the last days of the tedious voyage. Perhaps no one who has not experienced it may fully understand the land hunger that comes to those who have not seen it

for months, amounting almost to physical pain, nor the joy when in the dim distance the faint indistinct line of coast appears, at first vague and shadowy, but gaining density with every mile.

So from lip to lip one day on board the *Duchess of Leinster* there flew the cry, "Land ahead, land in sight!" a cry which brought every passenger on deck, and captain, mate, and quartermaster were alike pestered with questions as to when it was to be expected that the ship would reach her destination.

"Perhaps to-morrow; perhaps a week hence," was the cautious answer. "It depends upon whether this wind holds for the next forty-eight hours."

But the wind did hold in the favourable quarter, and the next morning, almost close at hand were those wonderful sugar-loaf rocks thrown like mighty cannon balls into the sea, that make the approach to the coast both difficult and dangerous. And there at last in the open roadstead the brig anchored, her arrival causing visible excitement in the little township. From the bell turret of the grey stone church a flag of welcome fluttered, whilst on the shore, where the great breakers fell in sonorous thunder breaking into foam, men could be seen busily launching the surf boats which should presently take off the passengers and their luggage. To the uninitiated that process of getting ashore seemed not unfraught with danger, but Mary forgot her own fears in

those of little Ruby, who, clinging fast to her gown, declared her purpose of abiding on the ship.

"Poor little child! she's remembering vaguely the terror of being lowered into the boat before," said Folkes. "Give her to me, Mrs. Godwin." And he held her fast in his strong arms until first Mary, then her husband and David were lowered in a basket to the tossing boat below, caught by the men who manned her, and safely seated.

"Now comes our turn, little one. Shut your eyes and we shall be there," said Folkes, cheerfully, and they too, in their turn, swung for a minute in mid-air, and then were seated by the others in the boat.

Then, with measured rhythm, the oars rose and fell, and the boat mounted the rolling waves like a joyous bird, until the final crest was reached and the keel grated on the shore in a white whirl of foam.

There many willing hands were ready to pull her out of reach of the next wave, and Mary, as she felt the solid ground once more beneath her feet, lifted her heart in quiet, deep thanksgiving to the God who had brought their long journey to a successful issue.

Then, shouldering his way through the group gathered on the shore, came a strong-limbed giant, of not less than sixty summers, but upright as a dart, with rubicund face and broad genial smile. He made straight for Abel, taking his hand and

swinging it up and down like a pump-handle as he talked.

"I need not ask who you are; you're my nephew Abel sure enough, a Godwin every inch of you, and plucky, too, to waste no time in writing, but to come yourself in answer to my letter. And this is the wife, eh? She might be made a little stronger for a settler's wife, but marriages are made in Heaven; isn't it so, my dear?" as he took her in his arms and gave her a resounding kiss. "And there'll be roses in your cheeks before you've been many weeks in our lovely island. Talk about the old country! she can't hold a candle to this land, where there's room to expand a bit. But the girl and the boy. Bless my soul! Well! we can't stop now to know how on earth you come provided with a ready made family. Pick up your traps and follow me. There's a bullock waggon that will take us out to the station. Quite in the world we are, only ten miles off."

It was quite impossible to get in a word edgeways, Jacob Godwin's voice was as large as his body and his heart, but before following the hospitable giant good-byes were said, David hanging wistfully behind to wring Folkes by the hand.

"It's not good-bye a bit," said Folkes, cheerfully. "I shall be in New Plymouth certainly for a month, and if I get work shall make it my headquarters. Don't forget the Maori. Speak

to every one you see. I think I'll come and help with the packing in."

Six beautiful red Devons, the pride of their master, who declared them the finest team of bullocks in the colony, were yoked to a long, narrow cart, into which Mary and Ruby were lifted, David clambering after, whilst Abel took his seat beside his uncle in the front. Folkes, with his hat off, watched the start, then turned back to await his luggage, not altogether joyful that the voyage was over. It was rather like the break-up of a family gathering. Meanwhile, the bullock-cart made its slow creaking progress through the quaint township, with its one-storied wooden houses, its broad unfinished roadways, which were smooth travelling indeed in comparison with the track into which they presently turned, which made no pretence of being a road at all; it was simply a clearing through the bush wide enough to take one waggon, the wheels sinking to their very axles into the ruts. But the day was gloriously fine, the journey ended, and Mary in no mood to make complaint of a jolting.

Each moment they were mounting higher, obtaining a clearer view of their surroundings, so wild and strange and beautiful. The township was now all hidden by the bush, but the Sugar Loaves stood out dark and threatening against the blue of the sea; then Mary's eyes followed along the broken line of hill until, standing quite alone in solitary dignity, Egmont's white head

appeared wreathed round with soft fleecy clouds, and below, the base of the mountain widening like a pyramid, clothed to its very feet in bush. Stretching away to the right was a range of irregular hills that only served to accentuate the height and exquisite beauty of the extinct volcano.

"Yes, he's a beauty, ain't he?" said Jacob, turning round and watching the direction of Mary's admiring eyes. "And he's just showing off by way of welcome. For days at a time he'll hide his head, and to-day he's smiling. All because of you, my dear!"

Mary began to think it was worth while to have broken up their home on the other side of the world to start another by the side of so lovable a relation as this, but even now she was to learn that there was another side to Jacob Godwin's character. There was a curious waving movement in the bush by the side of the track as if some animal had got astray in it, and presently the branches close to the bullock-waggon were thrust aside, and to Mary's intense astonishment and alarm a huge Maori stood revealed considerably over six feet in height and stout in proportion, his only clothing a cloth round his loins, a blanket across his shoulders, and a bunch of white feathers stuck behind his right ear. His colour was dark brown, his hair jet black; his features, especially his mouth, thick and unprepossessing. In his hand he carried a greenstone axe, with which he

had been hewing his way through the bush. With a curious imperious gesture he signed to Jacob Godwin to stop, and with contemptuous indifference Jacob called to the bullocks to halt. Mary, believing that her last moment had come, folded her hands, determining to meet it with becoming bravery, but a little smile in Ruby's face reassured her. The child sat there not the least alarmed at the black apparition, and a Maori greeting dropped from her lips, and David with a laugh echoed it. Had not Folkes told him to air his Maori upon the first opportunity? But the Maori was strutting up and down the track, waving his arms with passionate invective, only a word of which here and there could Jacob understand, but the general drift of which he gathered was remonstrance at the appropriation of some land that had been lately sold to him; but when the Maori proceeded to lay hands upon the Devons, waving his axe in mimic threatening, Jacob's face flushed purple.

"Hands off, you brute!" he called in resonant English. "Be off with you; I've bought the land and paid honest money for it, and it was not from you either. I'd not deal with such a rogue."

His long bullock whip was raised to strike, but Mary from behind caught his uplifted arm.

"Uncle Jacob, don't hit him; pray don't hurt him," she entreated.

"Well, well," he said, dropping his whip, and

calling to the bullocks to proceed, "it's wiser not to touch. They are devils for revenge. Sooner or later the Government must decide what to do."

The Maori apparently had delivered his protest, and was content, for he stood aside, watched the waggon pass with a scowling face, then disappeared swiftly into the bush. The whole incident had not lasted five minutes, but it effectually checked the sprouting hope that Mary could ever feel safe or happy in this strange land. Jacob dismissed the subject with a few hasty words.

"You must not let the black fellows frighten you, my dear," he said, with a return of his cheery manner. "They bluster a lot, but you have only to take a high hand, as I did just now, and they slink off like dogs with their tail between their legs. That fellow was Wiremu Kingi, a pestilent chief, who some time back posed as a friend of the pakeha, but he's grown rich through trading in potatoes with our Australian colonists, rich and insolent: not only won't sell his own land, but hinders those that would. I fancy all this fuss is about a block of land that I've bought lately, and just begun to clear. When I've got up a tidy house, I mean to start you and Abel on it."

It did not sound very encouraging, Mary thought, but now a pleasanter apparition came flying down the track in the shape of a girl seated barebacked on a horse. She kept her seat with

grace and ease, checked its gallop with a word, and, slipping to the ground, came forward with outstretched hands.

"So you've really got them, daddy. You've been so long—so long, we thought you were never coming. This must be cousin Mary," swinging herself up into the cart as she spoke, and lifting her comely face for a kiss.

"If you'd stop to get your breath, Pussy, I'd tell you who they are," cried Jacob, with a chuckle. "This is Abel by my side, and that dark-eyed boy is Mary's brother; David, I think, they call him; and the little lass beats me altogether."

"Oh, we'll tell you about her a little later on," interposed Mary, hurriedly. "You forget I don't know your daughter's name."

"Pussy, for daily use, because she's more spoiled than any kitten; but Margaret is her christened name. Now, Pussy, don't you hinder us. Jump on Mokau's back, and run back and tell your mother I'm coming and bringing four of them along. Be off with you, you rogue."

The words were almost the same as he had used to the Maori chief, but there was a world of difference in the intonation.

The girl obeyed at once. "Wiremu Kingi came to see you, daddy," she said, throwing back a laughing glance. "He was in a bad temper, and would not eat the meal I offered him." And Mary gathered comfort from the slight importance which the girl attached to the chief's visit.

But now the track widened considerably, and they emerged upon a big clearing in the bush. Acres of ground had been partially cleared, and much of it was under cultivation. A big one-storied wooden house stood in the centre, surrounded by a wide verandah, and clustered round the dwelling-house were buildings of different sorts and sizes, all of wood, put up evidently as they were needed without any special reference to beauty or order. Just in front of the house, however, was a broad bed brilliant with flowers, and the whole effect of the home stead, though un-English, was pleasing and comfortable.

A bevy of dogs flew out, barking boisterous welcome; some five or six young men, varying in age from two- or three-and-twenty to sixteen, came hurrying to unload the waggon.

"Tom, Dick, and Harry, my three sons," said Jacob, shoving forward the three eldest; "the others, lads that live with us to learn their calling; and here's the wife who manages us all, and tries to keep us good, eh! my dear."

Mary found both hands taken by a quiet, sweet-faced woman, whose fair hair was toning into grey, whose wrinkles showed that life had not been free from care, but the soft curve of mouth and chin bespoke the soft but firm sway with which she ruled her household. With kindly scrutiny her eyes swept Mary's face, and then she drew her into her arms.

"You're very welcome, my dear. I think we shall be friends."

"Strangers, and ye took us in," was brought very forcibly to Mary's mind that night, so perfect and unquestioning was the welcome accorded not only to herself and Abel, who possibly had some claim upon Jacob and his wife, but to David and little Ruby, who seemed curiously at home, and talked more than she had ever done before.

Her story, told when the child was safely tucked into bed, filled the house with pleasurable excitement and speculation.

There had been no ship sailing for England from New Plymouth in the course of the last month or two: of that Jacob was tolerably certain. He was not so sure about Auckland; communication with that town was not very frequent, but, anyway, it was established beyond doubt that Ruby had been born in the colony, was happy and familiar with its ways, and used to Maoris and their fiery gesticulations.

"You couldn't have done different than bring her along with you, poor mite," Jacob declared. "If you don't want to keep her, mother here would give her a home, although what Pussy might say to a ready-made sister, being as she is the only girl of the family, is more than I can tell you;" and he chucked the daughter, who sat on the arm of his chair, good-humouredly under the chin.

"Thank you," said a voice from the far corner

of the room; "but we are not going to part with Ruby, are we, Abel?"

There was a burst of laughter at the gravity of the announcement, for David was the speaker.

"Eh! but it's a good joke," said Jacob, holding his sides with laughter. "He might be the father of a family, mightn't he? instead of a boy who hasn't cut his wisdom teeth. He'll be too wise altogether when he gets them."

David, reddening, rose to make his escape, but Abel put out a detaining hand.

"Don't go, David: you've a right to speak if any one has; you were ready to go surety for Ruby, and, young or old, nobody could do more than that. To you and me it's no laughing matter, is it?"

The "you and me" mended David's hurt feelings. Abel took him seriously, however, the others might laugh!

CHAPTER V

"CHEM" FATHER

BEDTIME drew near and Harry Godwin, a gauche-mannered boy of about sixteen, offered to show David his quarters for the night. He carried a large stable lantern in his hand, and to David's silent astonishment, led him out of doors across a piece of land behind, where vegetables were planted, to a hut about a hundred yards away.

"It's the visitor's hut; I hope you'll find it comfortable," he said as he opened the door and threw the flickering light of the lantern about.

A low iron bedstead occupied one entire side; a packing case draped in chintz served the double purpose of dressing-table and drawers; a small mirror hung above it on the wall, and a basin and ewer perched upon a box completed the furniture of the tiny room. It was clean enough to please the most fastidious taste.

"Rather swagger, isn't it?" said Harry,

surveying it with pride. "But mother says people fresh from home are hard to please."

"I think it's awfully snug," said David, laughing; "and roomy too, after a cabin half its size which you share with another."

"We three brothers sleep in a bigger hut over yonder," continued Harry. "Mother made us give up our bedroom in the house to those two chaps that live with us. Well! I suppose you'll like to keep the lantern for to-night, won't you? Just to find your way about."

"Thank you," said David. He was but fourteen, and although he would have died sooner than own it, the prospect of a night alone in a strange hut and stranger land was not without its terrors.

It was some time before he was in bed and blew out his light, and when he fell asleep it was to dream of Maoris, strange fantastic monsters, more like baboons than men, who waved glittering green weapons about his head. It was in the pearl grey of dawn, fresh from one of these dreams, and as he lay between waking and sleeping he was conscious of something moving softly outside the thin wooden wall, and he heard a sound of heavy breathing.

"A dog!" he muttered, turning over on his side. "I'm not frightened!"

Yet he held his breath and listened, feeling the hearts throbs beating in his ear. He was certain that it was a hand that was feeling along

the wall, and presently it reached the door and trembled on the latch. There was no bolt, and David sat up in bed and shouted—

"Who's there?"

A pause, and no one stirred or answered; then David was almost sure that he heard the rustle of feet across the grass. He waited still a minute before he dared to go to the door and look out. It was an enormous relief to find nothing there, to hear no sound but the rustle of the wind blowing inland from the sea, and see no sight but the red light on the horizon, where rosy rays gave promise of the sun's rising. The wondrous beauty of the scene kept David breathless, and his fear was quickly dissipated with the passing of the night.

"It *must* have been a dog!" he said again, "snuffing round the hut, and putting its big paw up to the latch. I'll pull a box in front of the door to-night!"

He did not try to sleep any more, but dressing quickly, wandered about considering his new surroundings.

Everything was of the roughest, made for use and not for ornament. There was none of the finish of an English farm. The fences, if fences they could be called, were made of roughly felled boughs of trees strongly fastened together, unequal in height, with here and there a gap when the cattle had made a stampede and wandered away in the bush. The soil looked rich and good;

there was a freedom and richness of growth that spoke of virgin soil. And now the silence of the dawn was broken by a hundred unfamiliar sounds, the notes of birds unknown to David's ears. The lowing of cattle was cheering, speaking as it did of England. Not long after the sun had risen, a thin blue line of smoke issuing from the low chimney of the dwelling-house showed that the family was astir; and presently a girl's cheery singing rose and fell upon the morning air, and David saw Margaret, her blue print gown kilted to her knees, carrying milkpails across the field where the cows grazed. They lifted their heads at her approach, and one after another came to be milked in obedience to the girl's call. She patted each head in turn as she dismissed the owner.

"No, Diamond, don't be in a hurry; you know you come last, the darling of the herd. Yes, you beauty, I always kiss the star upon your forehead," were the words David heard as he drew near, and Margaret, looking up, became aware of his presence. She laughed aloud, showing pretty teeth.

"I was talking to myself, or rather to the cows. I often do, and they understand as well or better than human beings."

"They seem as if they knew you," David answered.

"They'd be ingrates if they didn't, handling them as I do twice every day. I'm proud of my

milking; it's not every one that can do it, but if you are good, very good, I may teach you."

David did not feel properly grateful. "I suppose I'll have to learn that and other things?"

"Of course you will; you can help me carry the cans if you like, and you shall have a look at my dairy."

David followed her, his shyness vanishing before her frank kindness, like dew before the sun. By the time she took him into breakfast he felt as if he had known her all his life.

The plans for the day were settled whilst they ate. Abel was to be taken by his uncle to see the land some miles further on, which was to be his to cultivate. Much clearing was already done, the site for the house chosen, and the wood sawn in readiness. In a month's time some sort of a homestead could be erected, and Abel and his wife could take possession. Meanwhile, the family were welcome to remain with Jacob Godwin. Mary was thankful for a day's rest. The two elder boys, Tom and Dick, were bound for the township, having business there, the three remaining lads turned out to work, and David stood watching Tom and Dick catch and saddle their horses.

"Would you like to come with us, young 'un?" said Tom, good-naturedly. "There's Pussy's mare you could ride if you wished, but perhaps a shaver like you can't sit a horse."

"I can, though," David answered. "I rode to and fro to school every day at home."

"Very well, I'll catch the mare for you; she would not let a stranger come near her."

The ride into New Plymouth seemed short indeed after the slow progress in the bullock-waggon of the day before, and David enjoyed the brisk canter. The road, when they reached it, was all alive this morning. Maoris in considerable numbers trooped towards the town, and white men, as they galloped by upon their horses or rubbed shoulders with them in the road, always turned to give them hearty greeting.

Near the town David noticed the variety of costume adopted by the Maoris, some in frankly European clothes which sat awkwardly upon them, others still in native dress, flax mats richly fringed cast over the left shoulder and reaching almost to the heels behind. David could but admire their fine proportions, and the stately grace with which they moved along. Very many of them, David noticed, wore the bunch of white feathers behind the left ear, a sign, Tom told him, that they belonged to Wiremu Kingi's tribe.

"It's a long name," David said, smiling.

"Yes; and there's the ruffian himself—Wi-Kingi he's called for short." And Tom and Dick nodded greeting to him as they passed.

The chief, in a shirt open at the neck, and capacious trousers, looked far less imposing and alarming than in his native state, as he carved

his pathway through the bush, nor did he take the slightest notice of the brothers.

"The governor's offended him somehow," Tom said carelessly.

They were riding down Brougham Street, when David broke into a joyful exclamation.

"There's a man I knew on board. I'm after him," he said, turning his horse's head to another street, down which Folkes was fast disappearing.

"All right, don't wait for us; go home when you like," Tom said. And David cantered off.

Folkes had come to a standstill before a proclamation posted on one of the public buildings. It was signed by the governor, and was a command for the speedy enrolment of a company of volunteers, to be called the Taranaki Volunteer Rifle Company. So engrossed was Folkes in its perusal, that he turned round quite startled when David laid a hand upon his arm.

"You again! Well, we've not been parted long," he said with a smile.

"And you were so taken up reading a stupid old notice, that you would have let me pass by unnoticed," David answered.

"That proclamation is a warning note, the precursor of a storm, I fear," said Folkes, gravely. "It means that men may have to fight to protect their homes and families. God grant that we English may not be the first to resort to arms."

Then David, slipping from his horse, walked by his side and told of the encounter with

Wi-Kingi the day before, Folkes listening attentively to every word.

"The man is the head and front of the Land League," he said.

"What's that?" David asked.

"A number of Maoris banded together to stop the further sale of land to the Europeans. Ihaia, another chief, is friendly to us, and willing to sell his land to our government, but the quarrel has risen to such heights that he and Wi-Kingi have been at war about it."

"Jacob Godwin says there's nothing to be afraid of."

"I hope he's right. I hear the governor comes in March to settle the dispute. With tact and arbitration, there ought to be no war."

For over an hour Folkes wandered with David about the township; then they parted, he to keep an appointment with the land commissioner, and David to go home.

It seemed wonderfully solitary as he rode leisurely along the track which already he had traversed twice, and although it was still broad daylight, he could not help glancing from time to time over his shoulder, feeling that lurking in the bush Wi-Kingi or one of his followers might lie in waiting. He was not, therefore, wholly taken aback when the branches parted and he saw a tall boy, dark skinned, dark eyed, dark haired, running along by his side, unmistakably a Maori. The boy was tall and lithe, and ran swift as any

deer, and David's first impulse was to spur the mare into a gallop, and distance his companion; but there was nothing but friendliness in the Maori's smile, so, on second thoughts, David drew rein and returned the smile, wondering how the adventure might end.

The Maori laid a friendly hand upon the mare's neck, and turned a beaming glance on David.

"How do?" he began. "This Maori speak English," and he laid a hand upon his breast.

David returned the salutation as best he might in Maori, and both boys laughed aloud together.

"Who taught you English?" David asked, glad enough to return to his mother tongue, and speaking loud and slow as if the boy were deaf.

"Chem father," answered his companion, quickly.

"Who?" cried David, in bewilderment.

"Bisop! Pakeha Bisop," explained the Maori. "Listen! One, two, three years this boy learned school. Chem father taught him, chem father poured water on him and called him George.

"Who *can* you mean?" cried David, more to himself than to George, and suddenly the Bishop of whom Folkes had talked so much, flashed across his mind.

"It's Bishop Selwyn you mean." And George laughed again, glad at last to be understood.

"Where is he now? Here?" asked David, eagerly.

George shook his head. "Ah, no! his school big school far from here."

"Where do you live?" David continued.

"Wi-Kingi's *pa;* we one blood; I'm a gentleman."

David suppressed his rising laughter. He had yet to learn that a long pedigree is a chief's unquestioned claim to nobility.

"Wi-Kingi asks why you come? He says, one day he and many others will sweep you into the sea. This is my word to you: go back again; this is the word I carried even this morning, but you called out loud, and I knew you were angry, and I ran away."

"It was you who came to my hut, then?" David said. "How did you know where to find me?"

"I tracked Wi-Kingi through the bush yesterday. Wi-Kingi fierce with too much drink. His words were angry words. I saw four of you—a big man, a woman, you, and a little girl. It came into my heart to come and tell you Wi-Kingi's anger hurts."

David eyed him searchingly. "Why do you tell me that?"

"I love the Pakehas; I wish them good; we worship the same God, the Lord Jesus Christ," George said quite simply.

This fearless confession of faith from a Maori

boy not many years older than himself, made David half shy, half ashamed, but to doubt or sneer was impossible.

"And that brought you here? Wi-Kingi did not send you?" David still inquired.

The brightness died out of George's face as he turned to go.

"When I speak the truth, chem father never asks me, is it so?" he said proudly; and David's only notion of apology was to put out his hand. George took and held it, looking in his face.

"Look here, George. I know you are my friend and wish me good. My name is David. Won't you say good-bye?"

"Good-bye, friend David"—with a brilliant smile; and then mysteriously, quietly, he was lost sight of in the bush.

David rode on his way wrapped in thought, greatly wondering at the strange experiences which were his in the brief time since he landed —within the first two days sworn to friendship with a Maori lad who had proved himself in that short interview a gentleman and a Christian, too. Then David's mind turned with something like longing towards "chem" father—the Bishop whose influence he had already discovered to be strong for good with white men and with black, for Folkes too had spoken of him many a time and oft, always with reverence and admiration; and there flashed across David's memory the first talk they had had about Selwyn, when Folkes in

roundabout fashion had hinted that it was to the Bishop that he owed his first serious thoughts about religion. And now this boy, brought up and taught by him, was not afraid to come and warn strangers of a lurking danger, from no other motive apparently than the love of God. But the message, David felt, involved responsibility. To whom should he pass it on? To frighten his sister would not be wise or right. Jacob Godwin would simply laugh at the whole thing, and Abel, of course, would follow his uncle's lead. It was a great relief that the first person he came across upon his return was Mrs. Godwin, who was busy amongst her poultry. She tilted back her sun-bonnet and smiled at him.

"So you've found your way back without let or hindrance; I chided Tom and Dick for leaving you to it."

"Oh, I was all right, thank you," David said, slipping from the saddle. Then looking round and lowering his voice, "I want to tell you something about a boy—George he calls himself, a relation of that man Wi-Kingi. He stopped me on the way and had a long talk with me."

Bit by bit David told Mrs. Godwin the gist of the conversation, not word for word, not that declaration of belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. That sentence was buried in David's heart, one day to bear much fruit.

"The boy is a good one, I think, and I am sure he means well," said Mrs. Godwin. "He

has been here several times since he came from Auckland. It's not been my luck to come across the Bishop, but he must be a fine man from what he does, although your uncle—I think you must call us uncle and aunt like the others, David—your uncle does not see eye to eye with the Bishop about this Maori question, and I very much doubt whether he will pay any attention to a warning from a mere boy. It hurt me a little that Tom and Dick laughed at George once when he came. They are good men enough; I'm proud of my boys; there is not one that would do a cruel thing; but boys, dark or white, don't fancy being laughed at, do they? and poor George has never been again. I am glad you have told me about it. I'll pass it on to your uncle."

Jacob Godwin, as David expected, turned the whole thing to ridicule. He and Abel had come back in high spirits from the day's expedition. The land which was to be Abel's was in the Waitara district, where the bush was not nearly so thick, and where clearing had been already begun.

"But some of those black fellows had been playing their monkey tricks," said Jacob at supper. "You remember, Tom, how we had piled the wood in readiness for the building of the house, the planks all neatly sawn. Well, you would not believe it, but not a bit of that wood was left standing together. It had been thrown all over the place, like a pack of cards. It will be a good

morning's work to collect it again. It's all there, safe enough; none of it carried off. I could have laughed, but for the mischief of the thing. They want whipping, like a pack of naughty boys."

"They'll get more than whipping, if they they don't look out," Tom answered. "Aren't you proud of your soldier sons, mother? Dick and I were enrolled to-day in the Taranaki Volunteer Rifle Company. Sounds grand, doesn't it?"

Then the Governor's proclamation was discussed, and what might be its full significance.

"I hope and pray that there may be no fighting," Mrs. Godwin said.

"I hope not, my dear," Jacob said. "If we do fight it will be to give these black men a lesson —teach them their place, you see."

"But the land was theirs," said Mary, timidly.

"Theirs once, but much of it ours now—paid for honestly. It's the Land League that's done the mischief."

The next day it was agreed that half the hands at the farm should migrate to Abel's land, and set to work in good earnest to put the house in shape. David, with Tom and Harry, were to remain at the farm, whilst Uncle Jacob, Dick, and the two other men were to take enough provisions with them to last for a week at least, and camp out under tents whilst they hurried on the house. Then, in the absence of the others, David received his first initiation in the really hard work

of a farm. It was one afternoon, as he was receiving a lesson from Margaret in milking, and being well laughed at for his clumsiness, that both he and his teacher became aware that they were being watched, and David, with quick upward glance, saw Folkes standing near. The boy established his reputation for clumsiness by springing to his feet and upsetting the half-filled pail of milk.

"Oh, how jolly! I never thought you'd get here so soon," he cried, his face one glad flush of crimson.

"How are you, David? Hard at work, it seems," Folkes said, with quiet amusement in his voice.

"Hard at mischief, rather," retorted Margaret, with laughter in her eyes.

Folkes turned towards her, doffing his cap. "Miss Godwin, I presume?"

"Yes, I am Margaret Godwin; and now I will finish David's work and let him show you about a little. Milking cannot wait;" and Folkes found himself dismissed with a merry nod.

How David chattered as they wandered round the farm!

"You've taken kindly to your new surroundings, David, and to your new relations. There is one thing that you did not tell me, however. You left it to burst upon me as a sort of surprise."

"What?" David asked.

"That Miss Godwin was beautiful."

"Is she?" cried David. "I never thought about it."

"The most beautiful girl I have ever seen," replied Folkes. "When you are my age, David, you'll know a pretty girl when you see her."

"Perhaps so," said David, indifferently.

CHAPTER VI

GATHERING CLOUDS

DAVID was busy, one sunny afternoon in February, mending the fence round Mrs. Godwin's poultry-yard, which stood sadly in need of repair; Ruby, as usual, dogged his heels, feeling herself both important and useful, as she offered him impossible pieces of wood or entirely unsuitable nails. The new home was not yet quite ready for habitation, but had suffered no injury in the course of erection, so George and his warning had faded from all minds save David's own. He had seen nothing of George since that one remarkable conversation.

This afternoon his whole attention was fixed on his work. Even Ruby's ceaseless chatter was only answered in monosyllables, for he was interested as well as busy, for his new environment was developing a general handiness and a special taste for carpentering that had hitherto lain dormant.

A dark shadow thrown across the fence at

which he worked made him look up for a moment, and there, close to him, almost as if he had sprung out of the ground, stood George.

"Hullo!" cried David; "I began to think I should never see you again."

But George was not listening; instead, his eyes were intently fixed on Ruby, who came staggering towards David with her pinafore full of chips of logs, which she poured triumphantly at his feet.

"Lots of wood, David!" she cried joyously. Then catching sight of George, she broke into a short Maori greeting.

"The little girl—is she your sister?" George said abruptly.

"No, no relation; she came with us on the ship," said David, not caring to trust George with her story until he knew him better, nor to mention it before Ruby.

George placed the back of one hand upon his forehead, drawing his eyebrows together in puzzled thought.

"Something inside me says I have seen her before; but where—that is too hard to say."

"You can't have," David said bluntly, resuming his work. "Ruby, this is George, a friend of mine. Do you know him?"

Ruby shook her head in vehement denial, and trotted away for more wood.

"There! you see what she says; she does not know you, and you did not even know her name."

Still George remained to the spot where he stood.

"It comes slowly, but it comes," he said. "I saw her not alone. She walked with a big man, a Pakeha. They went hand-in-hand, and he put her in a boat, and still he held her hand, and they reached a ship that waited in the sea, and she was carried up high, very high, and I saw her not again."

David was listening now with all his ears.

"George, are you sure? or is it—just a tale?"

George's dark eyes were full of deep reproach. "The word I speak is true, friend David."

"Tell me some more, then," said David, eagerly. "Can you remember the name of the ship?"

George shook his head.

"Was it here? Was the ship out at sea here?"

"No; in Auckland, where I dwelt at school."

"The Bishop's school? How long ago? Many weeks ago?"

"Five weeks—more perhaps—Wi-Kingi's anger waxed fierce against Chem father, and word was brought that I must stay no longer."

"And the ship you saw—when did it sail away?"

George was growing restless under the catechizing.

"I cannot tell. Friend David asks many questions."

"David," cried Ruby, running back flushed and hot, "Mother Mary says tea is ready. You can bring George in for some."

"Come, George," said David, kindly, hoping still to get more details of when and where he thought to have seen Ruby.

"No, I go my way," George answered. "Two men here laughed at me."

Ruby ran on ahead, her appetite quickened by her afternoon's service.

"If you won't stop now, you'll come and see us in the new house, George?" said David, lingering behind.

"You did not heed my words, yet they were wise words."

"Grown man won't listen to the words of boys," David said.

"But Wi-Kingi spoke fierce words. His anger is not good."

"Well," David said, much perplexed, "they say the Governor, Gore Brown, is coming, and will set things straight."

"Wi-Kingi will not heed. He would drive all the Pakeha into the sea," and George threw out his arms, suiting the action to the word.

David could not keep back his laughter. "Wi-Kingi will not find it easy to do that, George. Where English come they stick."

"Now you laugh and will not listen," George said sadly; "but one day I shall come, and you will know my words are true when they burn

your *whare* and put to death your cattle. I would not that this ill should fall on you. This is my last word about it."

The next minute he had gone, and David, much troubled, turned towards the house.

"Would not George stay for something to eat?" asked kindly Mrs. Godwin.

"No," David said, not mentioning his excuse.

"He seems to have taken a fancy to you, David," said Mary, smiling.

"I don't know whether he has or not, but," in a hasty undertone, "I really think he's mad."

Mary looked up quickly. "What do you mean? What is it that he says? It may not be safe for you to talk to him."

"Oh, lots of queer things; one that he has seen Ruby before."

Later on David told Mary all that George had said about Ruby.

"It may be the clue that will lead us to find out whom she belongs to," Mary said, deeply interested; "but it is so slight, the passing fancy of a Maori boy whom you have only seen twice, that I do not think we must place too much importance upon it."

"But some time we might find out what ships were leaving Auckland a month or two ago; whether there were English passengers on board."

"Yes," Mary said, "but the chances are ten to one that even in that case Ruby is an orphan.

She would not be travelling without father or mother."

It was to Abel that David decided to pass on that other warning about the new home when he returned. It would only frighten Mary, and do no good. Meanwhile, he confided it to no one but Folkes, who was a pretty frequent visitor at the farm. He had secured a temporary appointment on the land survey, work which took him a good deal about the surrounding country, and from all parts of it he brought the same story of excitement and unrest amongst the Maoris. Far from being inclined to laugh George's second warning to scorn, it occasioned him real uneasiness.

"Wi-Kingi is a big blusterer, and George may be attaching more importance to his vague threatenings than they are worth, but it shows that bad blood is brewing, and certainly your brother-in-law must not settle down in that lonely spot close to the disaffected district with only you and his wife. I hoped that Mr. Jacob Godwin will see his way to transferring either two of his sons or two other responsible men to your new settlement for a time until the colony settles down again."

"Couldn't he transfer me for a time?" said Margaret, gaily.

She had been sitting at needlework in the verandah, where Folkes and David talked, forgetful of her presence.

"I should just love to go with Mary and help

to get things straight, and I'm almost as strong as a man."

She rose as she spoke, and sent her working materials rolling over the floor of the verandah. Folkes stooped to capture them, returning them into her open hands. Yes, she was strong and tall and beautiful, and in his eyes, as they looked into hers, was written something of the admiration that he felt, and Margaret blushed a little.

It was but for an instant, then Folkes withdrew his gaze, breaking the constrained silence with a jest.

"But if the Maoris came peeping round the house or danced a *haka* at your door, you would be afraid like any other woman."

"Afraid of Maoris. Why no!" Margaret protested. "They are my friends. I should go out and speak to them. I don't believe that one of them would harm me. Father and I are not agreed about them. He cannot understand my liking them."

"It's only those that like them that can be just to them," Folkes said, rising to go. "You've never come down to see me yet, David, often as I've asked you."

"He has not had the time; he's the busiest man on the place," Margaret answered, smiling at the boy, between whom and herself a friendship had grown up in the last few weeks.

"I should not have expected you to be such a hard task-mistress. You'll be turning him

into a dull boy if you keep him so hard at work."

"It's his own energy," laughed Margaret. "However, I'll pack him off to-morrow. Sunday is a slack day for work, and I'll lend him my mare to ride into New Plymouth."

Very early the following morning David heard Margaret's voice outside his door.

"I've caught the mare and saddled her, and Mary has breakfast waiting, so don't ride away hungry."

David arrayed in his Sunday best soon entered the kitchen where the two kind women had breakfast ready, and did ample justice to the fare provided for him.

"I wish I were coming with you," Mary said.

"You!" cried David in astonishment. It was seldom that his sister expressed any desire for pleasure or for change. "I didn't think you cared about going out."

"I would give something to get to church again," Mary said, with tears in her eyes. "Can't you put me in your pocket, David?"

"I don't know that I'd thought about going," he said, a little awkwardly. "Of course, it's right enough for those who like it, but I suppose I've got used to doing without. I expect grown-up people like church-going better than boys. I don't see how they are to like it much, do you? Why, Mary, I've not vexed you, have I? It was jolly of you and Margaret to get up early just to

see me off;" and David squeezed her arm in token of gratitude as he passed out.

In another moment he waved to the two women who watched him from the verandah as he galloped by.

"Do you think it matters, Mary? When a boy is good and straight, like David, does it signify whether he goes to church or not? Look at all of us. We cannot get to church more than three or four times a year."

"Because you can't," said Mary quickly; "but perhaps you want to."

"I don't know that I do particularly. To work hard and be kind seems the best way of being good."

"Oh, there's a lot in it," Mary said; "but to me there's something more. There's worship; and saying my prayers at home is not the same thing as saying them in company with a number of God's people. You see, I'm a clergyman's daughter, and you can't forget the way in which you've been brought up; and I want David to be the man father would have wished."

Margaret turned and kissed her. "You're so queer; you are only a year older than I am, and you look almost a child, you are so fair and slight, and yet in ways you're like a grandmother. You've made a big mistake in coming out here. You're not go-ahead enough."

"A woman goes where her husband goes,"

Mary said, choking back a longing she had for England and English ways.

"And as I've not got a husband I go where I like, and I've quite decided that I'm coming with you to your new home, and shall stay until you are settled. There now! in England I suppose you would be ever so much surprised if any one proposed to come and visit you."

"I might be surprised, but I should be exceedingly pleased if the visitor were you."

"You've nice canoodly ways rather like a kitten. Now I come to think of it, you're like nothing in the world but a long-tailed tortoise-shell kitten. That's why it's so funny that you are so demure and wise. By rights you ought to be running after your own tail. But I hear the cows lowing; I must be off milking"

Meanwhile David, who had been the cause of the discussion, was riding along in high spirits at the prospect of his holiday The weather was all that heart could desire, and the fleecy clouds that had enveloped Mount Egmont climbed higher and higher each moment up its scarped sides, until the whole crater came in view, and David seeing that the mountain "smiled," as Jacob Godwin put it, knew that the brilliant weather would hold at least until sunset. It was pleasant when he turned upon the high road to hear the ring of it under his horse's hoofs, to feel himself once again among the haunts of men. It was clear that something was astir, for many

besides himself were hurrying towards the township, some on horseback, others on foot. Among these latter he noticed ahead of him a man of middling height, with a bag on his shoulder, walking rather wearily, as if footsore. Something in his figure and bearing, more than in his dress, suggested that he was a parson, and David turned to look at him as he trotted by. A parson sure enough, and something in his face took David's fancy. It was strong and kind, and kindly too was the smile with which he returned David's scrutiny, revealing to the boy that his curiosity had outstepped the limits of good manners. He coloured a little and reined in the mare.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but can I carry your bag?"

"No thank you; I'm so near the town it scarcely seems worth while. A few miles back I should have been glad of the offer, for the sunshine is quite enervating."

David took off his cap and cantered on. Folkes greeted him heartily when he arrived, and soon told him the cause of the flying flags and general excitement. The *Iris*, a man-of-war of twenty-six guns, was in sight, bringing his Excellency, the Governor. She was expected to put in at Port Eliot about noon, and he was to be received with due honours—a salute from the Royal Artillery when he reached the shore.

"Can't we see the *Iris* come in?" David asked.

"Yes, if you look alive we might get a capital bird's-eye view of the whole thing from Paritutu, the highest of the Sugar Loaves."

David needed no urging; it was but a matter of a moment to unsaddle the mare, turn her into a paddock close at hand, and then he and Folkes started off at a brisk pace along the shore in the direction of the Sugar Loaves some two miles away. It was the one that adjoined the land that Folkes proposed to climb, a peaked conical hill about five hundred feet in height. The four others, rocky islands, pushed forward in a straight line into the sea; black jagged rocks, whose formation suggested that in some pre-historic age they had been the lips of some huge volcanic crater.

At low tide two of the five were accessible from the shore, but now the tide was high, and round the base of Paritutu the waves broke in swirling foam. The first part of the climb was easy of ascent, as the sandy soil covered with undergrowth secured a safe foothold, but about two hundred feet from the top the rock rose perpendicularly, black and hard as iron. In the face towards the sea were hewn a few steep steps.

"It's a stiffish climb with nothing to hold on by. Can you do it?" Folkes asked, glancing above.

"You go first; I'll follow," David said.

"Look up, then; not below into the sea lest you turn giddy."

And David had to confess, as he followed Folkes breathlessly, that to climb the rigging of a ship was an easier task than the one he now tackled, from the fact that on a ship there were ropes to cling to. But arrived at the top, the wildness and beauty of the view fully rewarded him for the effort of climbing. Turning seawards to north and south, an indistinct line of jutting cape stretched dimly to the horizon. Along the broken shore-line the great waves leaped and danced in prismatic coloured foam, and with a favouring wind the *Iris*, with all sails set, swept towards port. Fresh from dim rumours of a Maori rising, the sight of the beautiful English man-o'-war was reassuring, and David, lifting his cap, broke into a cheer. It was impossible that those on board could hear him, but it relieved the boy's patriotic enthusiasm. Behind them was mile after mile of low bush, covering hill, and valley alike, save where some few acres cleared here and there and under cultivation, showed the presence of the English settlers, whose safety and interests the Governor on board the *Iris* was bound to protect. There could be no real cause for alarm over George's warnings, David thought.

"We should beat the Maoris if it came to fighting," he said to Folkes, voicing his thoughts.

"But Maoris are brave men, and the Pakeha have given them guns to fight with," said a soft voice behind them.

It was George who spoke, who, for the third

time now, appeared with the suddenness of an apparition. He too had climbed the hill to watch the incoming of the English ship, and, hearing voices, had hidden himself in the Maori hole dug out in the top of the mound, where, in earlier times, warriors had lain concealed, able to keep up a deadly fire upon their enemies below. He showed it now to David, telling him that not very many years before the hill was held by eleven Pakeha and a hundred or two of Maoris against an invading hostile tribe ten times superior in number.

"And did they conquer?" David asked, thrilling at the graphic recital, picturing the invading force swarming up the rocky sides only to be hurled back into the sea.

"Yes, conquered and ate them," said George, quietly. "Such was the land before the Pakeha taught us the love of God. Now, now, Chem father says men, dark or white, are brothers, who must not fight."

Folkes, who had stood back a little, listened with kindling eyes; but now he broke silence, talking to George in rapid Maori, and George's sad face brightened. Here was a Pakeha who understood him like his Bishop, and with quick, rapid gesture he answered him.

"We have mutual friends, George and I," he said presently. "We both have learned lifelong lessons under the Bishop."

Then silence fell upon the trio, for the *Iris*

had rounded the Sugar Loaves, and was dropping anchor, whilst the boat which should bring the Governor and his party ashore pushed off. A flash of light along the *Iris*, a salute that echoed in the surrounding hills, showed when the Governor had started for the land, and another salute from the Royal Artillery, drawn up on shore to greet him, announced his arrival. Then the crowd below slowly dispersed, and Folkes and David prepared to descend.

"You go first, friend David next, and I, last of all, for the way is steep," said George, a little anxiously.

"I'm not afraid," said David, resenting what seemed like patronage; and yet not all unheeded was the warning, for David, in descending, placed his foot upon a jutting fragment which gave beneath him. For one sickening instant it flashed across his brain that he was going to fall into the seething waves below, when a firm hand upon his collar behind enabled him to regain his lost footing. He dare not look back nor breathe a word of thanks until he reached the point where the rocky ladder merged into the sandy hill below. Then he turned, white and gasping, and caught George's hand.

"I don't know, but I think you saved my life," he said, rather huskily; but George swiftly drew away his hand and turned off in another direction.

"I was wrong to take you there," Folkes said,

when David told him what had happened; "but that George is a fine fellow, a worthy pupil of the Bishop's. I wish I did him as much credit. By the way, George says that the Bishop is in New Plymouth preaching at the church to-night. Would you like to hear him?"

"Yes," answered David, soberly. His recent escape made him anxious to attend church quite as much as his desire to hear the Bishop.

Then he told Folkes of the travel-stained parson he had passed on the road.

"Why, it's the man himself," cried Folkes.

"What man?" questioned David.

"The Bishop! The Bishop on tramp; and I expect what brings him this way is the trouble with the Maoris;" and Folkes was right.

CHAPTER VII

A MUTTERING OF THUNDER

THE church was packed from east to west; there was scarcely standing room when Folkes and David entered the door that Sunday evening. Finally they both found places against a wall which commanded a view of the pulpit, and although kneeling was out of the question, David's prayers were more real and earnest than ever in his life before. It was odd that the son of a clergyman, saturated from childhood up with religious teaching, should travel to the other side of the world before ever the spirit of worship touched him.

Hitherto it had been something which had commanded his reverence, but to-night it stirred him like a living presence. His attention was caught and fixed by psalms and lessons, the prayers became his own, and as the hymns rang triumphantly through the building, David lifted up his voice and joined in them lustily. The "God, the Help of ages past," had been his help

to-day, saving him from a horrible death through the means of a boy whom he found it hard to regard as his equal because in colour he differed from himself. David's heart was soft that night like the heart of a little child, his ears were open to hear any message that God should send to him. And the message was this—

"Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts."

The voice that delivered it was the Bishop's, as he stood in the pulpit regarding with keen eyes the crowd of upturned faces, and it needed but one glance to assure David that Folkes's guess was accurate, and the parson that David had accosted that morning was none other than Bishop Selwyn. In church he was a far more imposing figure than in his dusty travelling suit, but the attractiveness of the face was quite independent of its setting. He had a high, broad forehead, deep-set grey eyes, a straight nose, and clean-shaven mouth, the strong curves of which betokened a strong character. The hair, parted on one side and curled over one ear, and the whiskers were slightly tinged with grey, a truly noble face, with the nobility that nothing but goodness can give.

It is not difficult to imagine the lines upon which the sermon was laid, preached at a crucial crisis of life in the colony to a congregation of English people. It was a stirring, eloquent appeal for the Maoris so dear to the Bishop's

heart, and amongst whom God had so marvellously blessed his work, for wisdom and patience in the handling of them; above all, that any disputes with them should be settled by arbitration rather than by arms.

"Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts, the Spirit of love and gentleness, of mutual forbearance. Friends, brethren, let us pray for that Spirit with its sevenfold gifts to-night, that His presence may be with us in the council which is to be held this week."

So he ended, and the hymn which was sung after the sermon was the Veni Creator.

With the bulk of the congregation the Bishop's pronouncement was received with marked disfavour, and on all sides, as David left the church, he heard free criticism of the opinions therein expressed.

"He's just a crank where Maoris are concerned. It's a big mistake for a man to try and mix up politics and religion. They won't jump together," and much more of the same character.

"Do you believe him? Do you believe what he says?" David asked, as he hurried along by Folkes's side in the dark.

"To my very soul; it's natural I should, for the Bishop brought me up, and has most probably moulded my judgment; but it's a complicated question. Some of the Maoris are for us and some against, and the general opinion amongst the colonists is that it's not fair that

blusterers like Wi-Kingi should be allowed his way. But I hope Tuesday's council will bring him to reason."

"The quarrel is all about land, isn't it?"

"Yes; Wi-Kingi and his followers are leagued together not to sell us any more, and even dispute the possession of some that we have paid for. Now, David, you must be getting on your way, or you will be benighted. You may trust to the mare to take you home all right."

So in the wonderful silence of the starlit night David cantered home, his mind full of a thousand new ideas, his heart aroused to the sense of a personal God, the Father of him and all mankind. It was that thought that took from him any sense of loneliness or fear as he passed through the lonely bush. When he reached the farm he found that Uncle Jacob and his two sons and Abel Godwin had returned that afternoon, leaving the other two men behind them to take care of the place. The flitting was to take place on Wednesday.

"You won't find easy chairs or sofas, my dear," said kindly Uncle Jacob, patting Mary on the shoulder, "but just a wooden shelter strong enough to resist wind and weather. We've knocked up a few chairs and tables and quite a stylish dresser, and with Margaret here to help you, you'll not take long to make it look something like home."

"Oh no," said Mary, happy in the joy of

Abel's return. "I've learned a lot in these weeks here, and when we get our cows and poultry about us, we shall be quite a happy colony of our own."

In the excitement of Uncle Jacob's return, David and his day out were forgotten, and nobody troubled to ask him what he had done, but when presently he related that the Governor had arrived there was quite a stir of interest.

"Well, that's a comfort, anyway," said Uncle Jacob. "I hope he'll give the niggers a piece of his mind, for we've had about enough of their impudence. You did not chance to hear when he was going to talk to them, did you, David?"

"On Tuesday, in the paddock near the Land Commissioner's house; and oh! I should so love to be there."

Uncle Jacob laughed with easy good nature.

"Now, would you, laddie? Each man to his taste! Mine don't lie in the direction of a company of darkies, but Pussy here loves 'em better than whites, I believe. However, there's the bullock dray going in on Tuesday to fetch out some things for your new home. You can go with it if you want to."

David eagerly accepted Jacob Godwin's offer, and the following Tuesday found him in New Plymouth making his way quickly towards the paddock, where the parley with the native chiefs was to be held.

He was early enough upon the ground to

secure a good seat on the fence which surrounded the enclosure, from which he could see all that was going on inside. It was an exciting scene for the English-bred boy. Some hundreds of natives were assembled there, gathered in groups about their several chiefs. Squatted in a corner, aloof from the rest, with comparatively a small number of followers, David saw Wiremu-Kingi, resplendent to-day in a handsome flax mat, richly fringed, and reaching almost to his heels, over his left ear a tuft of white feathers, and laid across his knees a curiously carved spear. His face wore a sullen menacing expression, and he sat in utter silence, his eyes held straight in front of him. Presently a slight stir outside the paddock, and a general rising of the Maoris to their feet, announced the arrival of the Governor, and David saw his Excellency, in full colonel's uniform, followed by a few men in ordinary dress, walk quietly across the grass and take their stand in the centre of the field. The Governor returned the native greeting with a military salute, wisely ignoring the fact that Wi-Kingi and his followers were the only Maoris who remained seated, and apparently entirely unmindful of his presence. David, absorbed in the scene, could only catch the general drift of the Governor's speech, which expressed a firm determination for the up-holding of the rights of the settlers, and that no Maori who was wishful to sell land to the Pakeha, and had the right to do so, should be hindered by

threat or terrorism. Te-Teira, one of the leading chiefs, seemed well pleased with the Governor's words, and offered the whole of his land at Waitara for sale, laying a worked mat at his feet as he did so, a native custom which showed the offer to be a genuine one. Others were following his example, when Wi-Kingi rose to his feet, murmuring something to his followers. Then he pushed his way towards the Governor, spouting fiery expostulation as he marched up and down in front of him with angry gesticulation.

His words on the memorable day of March, 1859, are a matter of history.

"Listen, Governor," he said; "notwithstanding Teira's offer, I will not permit the sale of Waitara to the Pakeha. Waitara is in my hands. I will not give it up; I will not, I will not, I will not. I have spoken."

Then, with some contemptuous expression, he turned his back upon his Excellency.

"Arise, let us go," he said to his handful of followers, and he and they beat a rapid and unmannerly retreat; and thus the meeting closed in a far less orderly way than it had begun.

David, utterly bewildered, had watched without the least being able to grasp the significance of the situation. With his slight knowledge of the Maori language, he was only able to understand a word here and there of Wi-Kingi's speech, and he looked about for somebody to explain what had occurred.

"Rocks ahead," said a voice at his elbow, and there stood the Bishop, a very sad look on his face, talking inadvertently to himself.

"Oh, tell me, tell me, please, what it means?" David said, unable to keep silent; and it was only the amused smile with which the Bishop greeted the question that made him realize that he had accosted a stranger.

"Why, surely, it's the boy who kindly offered to carry my satchel yesterday," said the Bishop, who had a wonderful faculty for remembering faces.

"I beg your pardon; I know I ought not to have spoken," David said, colouring; "but you must know if any one does. Folkes says you know more about Maoris than any man in New Zealand, and there's George too. He's talked such a lot about you that it didn't seem as if I were a stranger, but—but——" and David came to a pause, feeling as if he had tied himself into a knot, and could not get free.

"Nor will you be a stranger in a few minutes, when I can disentangle your words," the Bishop answered, kindly linking his hand in David's arm. "And, first of all, what is your name, and where do you come from?"

Then, with that wonderful sympathy of his, the Bishop drew from David his story from the beginning to the time present; the sacrifice of his ambitions, his voyage out, his friendship with Folkes, the rescue of Ruby, and the wonder of

the new life about him. Clearly David was a boy of no ordinary intelligence, the Bishop thought. He had the seeing eye and hearing ear of riper years.

"Folkes is a first-rate fellow; you could not have a better friend," he commented. "I had hopes in the days that were earlier that he would have seen his way to take Holy Orders; but after all, laymen such as he can do splendid work."

Then he harked back to Ruby's story, noting every detail with careful attention.

"On my return to Auckland I may be able to find out something about her," he said, "although I have not much to go upon, not even a surname, nor the name of the ship in which she travelled; if, indeed, George is not mistaken in believing that he has seen her before."

"It's not likely, is it, sir, that there would be people who would claim her? Such a little girl must have had her people with her," David asked, rather anxiously.

"If it were so, you could be glad for the father or the mother who would find the child that was lost, could not you, David?"

"Coming like that off the sea, it seems as if she belonged to us," David said.

The Bishop's smile was very tender; the boy's devotion to the waif was self-evident.

"Well, anyway we are agreed that inquiry must be made, aren't we? Meanwhile, time presses," looking at his watch. "If I have

anything to communicate, where shall I write to you?"

David felt filled with a sudden importance.

"The post-office here would be the safest place, sir. They send in for their letters at intervals."

"Very well; 'David Copeland, Post-Office, Plymouth,' will find you," said the Bishop, scribbling the words down in his pocket-book.

"C.O. Mr. Jacob Godwin, please sir. They won't know me," corrected David.

It was not until the Bishop had shaken hands with him and departed that David remembered that he had given him no explanation of the stormy ending of the Governor's parley with the Maoris. However, George could give him that next time he saw him.

"Bluster and insolence; nothing more," laughed Jacob Godwin, when David told the united party at supper that evening the story of his day. Of his talk with the Bishop he made no mention. That was his own affair.

Later in the evening, when Ruby came as usual to be carried off to bed by him, and Mary followed to undress and put her to bed, David told her of his interview with the Bishop. Ruby laid down just as she was upon her little bed, and tired out with the day's play, had fallen fast asleep as he talked, and he glanced down at the rosy parted lips and the dark fringed eyelids with a wistful look.

"You don't want the Bishop to find any one belonging to her, do you, Mary?"

"Not for you nor myself, Davie, but if there's any one living to whom she really belongs, it would be hard if he or she did not get her. Your very own! Just think what it means."

David turned and left the room quickly, wondering if he had set the stone rolling which should deprive him of the one who, after Mary, was the dearest to him in the world.

The next day began the family flitting to "Poimena," which was the name Jacob Godwin had bestowed upon the new settlement, a Maori word meaning a little hill, especially appropriate to the hillock on which the log house was erected; and there ensued for David the real discipline of a settler's life, week after week of hard manual labour with never a break in the monotony, and nothing of the romantic interest which had marked the first month of life in New Zealand. For one thing, the novelty of his surroundings was abated; the sight of dark men stealthily watching him as he worked no longer filled him with sinister forebodings. He and his lived on day after day entirely unmolested. Evidently Wi-Kingi's threats had ended in smoke, and the majority of Maoris were well content to share their land with the Pakeha, and learn from them how best to cultivate it. George came and went but made no mention of danger; his friendship confined itself entirely to David and Ruby, not even Mary's kind gentleness

could lure him inside the house nor persuade him to break bread with the family. It must be confessed that with the quieting of David's fears the dulness of existence became more evident. The fifteen miles that separated Poimena from the town implied complete and entire isolation in the wet winter months.

Folkes, who had grown to be David's intellectual centre, appeared only at long and rare intervals, and since Margaret, the magnet which drew him, had returned to her father's house, he had not been once to Poimena. With the two young men who had been transferred from Jacob Godwin's house to Poimena for the winter, David had little more in common than that he shared a big log hut with them at night, and was unmercifully chaffed when he tried to pursue his studies in bed by the light of a candle propped in a glass bottle above his head. Indeed to learn anything fresh seemed impossible; it was all he could do to keep to the level he had attained when he left England. But although in many points the life was distasteful to David, it developed him physically and morally as no ordinary school life at home would have done. The daily strenuous work made him big and strong; he developed a thoughtfulness for the sister who was certainly working beyond her strength, but whose cheerfulness and good temper never failed, learning day by day to save her from tasks which were too heavy for her.

"You've grown quite a man, and yet you've got ways like a girl, David," she said one day as he came in, wet to the skin yet bearing in his arms an armful of logs, which he piled neatly by the side of the open fireplace. "You're a kind of sister and brother all in one. Abel was saying to-day, he'd never get on without you."

"I'm getting on for a man now; I'm fifteen to-day," David answered, ignoring the praise which nevertheless warmed his chilled heart.

"The thirtieth of September! Why, so it is," Mary said; "and the first time in all your life that I've forgotten it, but everything is topsy-turvy out here. Would it not be nice if some big fairy could just lift us up and carry us straight to England, where we could spend the happy autumn day together;" and Mary gave a little laugh that had tears behind it.

"It seems as if that were all dead and buried, never getting a line from any one," David said. "I wonder if old Peter Godwin ever wishes us back. I should have been at school still if I had stayed with him."

"Stayed with him!" Mary echoed. "But there was never a question of your staying;" and David knew that in another minute the cat would be out of the bag, and that he would have to confess that old Peter, from mere vexation of spirit, had been ready to adopt him as his heir.

Happily, however, there was a diversion, for there was a sound of voices outside the door and

Abel entered, and behind, shaking the rain from his coat, came Folkes.

"Well," cried Mary, welcoming him with outstretched hands, "we thought you were never coming again, and now it's but a poor welcome that the weather is giving you. A birthday treat for David, too. We are so far from home that we'd forgotten all about it."

David's beaming smile spoke the welcome that he could not express, and Folkes's hand rested on his shoulder for a minute.

"It's partly news from home that's brought me," Folkes said, drawing nearer to the log fire that crackled so cheerily. "I happened to look in at your uncle's, and heard there were letters waiting for you, so as I really wanted to see you all, I offered to bring them on. Why, Ruby!" as the child came dancing forward, "you've grown as red as your name. Has David taught your curly head its letters yet?"

"No, no," Ruby laughed defiantly. "Ruby doesn't want to learn! Ruby won't learn. Dear David won't make her;" and she climbed with happy confidence into his arms.

"Humph!" ejaculated Folkes, as he took a bundle of letters from his pocket. "It is self-evident who is mistress of the situation. Two for you, Mrs. Godwin, two for your husband, and I'm pretty sure there is one for David too, if only I can find it. Here, Ruby; come and give your sweetheart his letter. It's bruised and dirty; I

fancy it has lain at the post-office for a long time. Kiss it to make it well before you hand it on."

Ruby took the letter, turning it over in her small hands, kissing each dirty spot before she gave it to David, little knowing as she did so that that letter would decide her future fate, but David guessed it as he held it unopened in his hands. The letter must be from the Bishop, and would contain news of Ruby's relations.

Abel and Mary had withdrawn to a distant corner of the room, where together they were eagerly conning their first news from home; Folkes had gone out to put his horse in shelter for the night.

David sat on with Ruby on his knee, and presently broke the seal of his letter and began to read it. He had not finished when he felt Ruby's fingers upon his forehead.

"It's a nasty horrid letter; it's making David cross, and I'm smoothing out the little lines upon his forehead," she said.

At the sound of her voice Mary came forward into the firelight, her face very white, and her great eyes sad and wistful.

"It's odd that we should have been talking of poor Uncle Peter. He's had a stroke, and lies at the Holt as helpless as a log, and there he may lie, the doctor thinks, for years and years. Oh, Abel! we left too soon."

"I did it for the best, dear," Abel said, rather drearily.

"And I have bad news too," said David. "She's got to go! Ruby has got to go. The Bishop——"

The sentence remained unfinished, for Ruby broke into bitter wailing, and would not be comforted.

CHAPTER VIII

RUBY'S FATHER

"I CAN'T for the life of me understand what all this fuss is about," Abel said, when the weeping Ruby had been carried from the room in "Mother Mary's" arms.

He had a man's hatred of a scene, and was vexed at being in the dark.

"Who is it that writes to you and puts in a claim for Ruby?" he went on.

In very few words David put him in possession of the story—of George's recognition of the child, and of his own mention of the tale to the Bishop.

"It would have been more natural if you had mentioned it to me instead of an utter stranger," Abel said.

"I did talk to Mary about it; it didn't seem worth while talking to you, for you never did anything but laugh at George's words."

"That's true enough," Abel admitted; "and I've had reason to laugh, haven't I? I should

not have been here now if I had paid any attention to what he said, and I don't suppose that I should have taken more heed of this story than the other. He seems to me only half baked."

Folkes, coming in quietly, saw the distress on David's face and the vexation on Abel's. Without waiting to inquire the cause, he prepared at once to soothe both.

"Is it any private matter under discussion? Shall I go?" he said.

"Not a bit of it," said Abel. "All the world seems to know it except myself. Your Bishop apparently thinks he has discovered relations of Ruby who send in a claim for her. She shall not go unless I think that claim fully justified."

David shot a glance of unspeakable gratitude, before which Abel's passing vexation melted away.

"That meets your views too, doesn't it, David?" he said, with a smile. "Go ahead; let's hear the Bishop's letter."

David cleared his throat, and began it very unsteadily.

"Dear David Copeland" (it ran),

"It was agreed between us that I should write to you if I could obtain any clue towards the identification of your ocean waif, Ruby. Upon my return to Auckland I made inquiries about ships and their passengers leaving this port in the last few months, but could discover nothing

about any child answering to the name of Ruby. The story had nearly slipped my memory, when Providence placed the clue which shall unravel the mystery about her straight into my hands. Far away up-country, in a confirmation tour I have made lately, I was called in to see an English settler named Kempe, who had broken his leg, and lay with no one to nurse or look after him but a Maori woman. I stayed the night with him, and gathered that he was a widower, and that his poor little English wife, upon her death bed, implored him to send their only child, a little girl, back to their relations in England, and that, in obedience to that wish, he had hurried down to Auckland, and found there a homeward-bound schooner, the *Albion*, carrying no passengers. The skipper's wife, a kindly, motherly woman, was on board, and promised to do a mother's part by the child. 'But,' went on Mr. Kempe, 'I've fretted so after my little Ruby that again and again I've had it in my heart to wish that I had not let her go until I could have taken her myself. As yet I've had no news of her safe arrival, and, allowing every chance of wind or weather, I ought to have heard of it by now.' A very little more talk convinced me beyond shadow of doubt that Mr. Kempe is the father of the child, and I presently broke to him that she was living, although I feared that the vessel and all on board her were shipwrecked. His emotion was so great that I fear it may retard his recovery.

Of course, his one desire is that the child shall come to him with as little delay as possible. As he is unable to fetch her, he is willing to pay every expense for her proper escort, but I well know what a difficulty this will prove. Consult your friends what can be done about it, and let me know as soon as you conveniently can."

"Poor man!" sighed Mary, who had slipped in unseen and heard the purport of the letter. "What agony of mind he is suffering! Didn't you say that the letter had been lying for some time at the post-office?"—turning to Folkes.

"For quite three weeks, I fear."

"And now we've got it I can't see my way clear," Abel said. "By good rights I ought not to give up the child until I've seen her safely with her father; but it's just impossible for me to leave the farm, and it might prove a wildgoose chase, after all."

"Let me take her," said David, quietly.

Abel gave a whimsical smile. "You are a bit young for the responsibility, and yet I know no one who has a better right to do it; but I don't think I could lay hands on the money to send you."

"That's covered by the postscript," Folkes said, who was re-reading the Bishop's letter. "He refers us to a very well-known man in New Plymouth, who would forward the necessary funds."

"And suppose Ruby frets herself ill over going?" Mary asked anxiously.

"The less she is told about it the better. She'll be quite content to know that she and David are to have a holiday together," Abel answered. "I don't think it would be wise to set her brain working as to where she is going, or whom she is to meet. If Mr. Kempe's story is true, she will be certain to recognize her father when she sees him."

"It can't be anything but true; the Bishop is a man of sound judgment. In a case like this, he would work on nothing but a certainty," Folkes said. "There is a ship starting for Auckland the day after to-morrow. Could they be ready for it? If they miss that, they may have to wait for some weeks."

"Yes," Mary said. "Ruby's things won't take long to pack."

"Then perhaps I had better ride ahead in the morning, interview this friend of the Bishop's, borrow the necessary money, and take their passages. If you could name an hour for landing them at Port Eliot, I would be there to put them on board."

The next morning Mary was astir with the dawn, packing Ruby's tiny wardrobe into as small a space as possible, and putting together the few simple necessaries that David might require. He stood watching her rather solemnly, feeling that she was packing away his boyhood

with his other clothes. The sense of responsibility made him feel like a man.

"It seems hard now we've got to give her up," Mary said, and on the lid of Ruby's trunk a large tear fell; "but there will be your return to look forward to, David, although you must not hurry home if Mr. Kempe should want you to stay a little while. Ruby might fret."

"She won't want me when she gets to her father," David said, turning on his heel to hide the fact that there were tears in his own eyes.

Meanwhile Ruby, the centre of the excitement, had completely forgotten her griefs of the night before, and was one ripple of delight that she and David were to have a long, long ride in the bullock dray together. Yet, long before New Plymouth was reached, the child had laid her head on David's knees and fallen fast asleep, and was happily still drowsy when transferred tenderly to the boat which was to convey David and her to the ship. It was Folkes's arms that held her, and the day was a fairly calm one. Once on board, the child trotted about with all the assurance of an old traveller, whilst Folkes gave David a few last instructions.

"There was no difficulty about money, David; the Bishop's guarantee was enough; and you'll keep this purse hung round your neck night and day. You'll be landed at Onehunga—a small port on the western side of the peninsula. Auckland proper lies on the east, some eight miles

away, but you won't find it difficult to get across. There is sure to be something that will take you. Make straight for the Bishop, and your difficulties will be at an end. I have written him this letter, to tell him exactly what I've done;" and then Folkes climbed down into the boat which waited for him, and David was afloat with his responsibilities.

They were light enough on board ship, for the kindly woman that shared Ruby's cabin mothered her by night, and David was her devoted slave by day. David's first anxious moment was when, three days later, he stood on the quay at Onehunga, with Ruby clinging to his hand.

"Where are we going to now, David?" she asked.

"To Auckland, when we can get there," he said.

Drays and waggons stood by the side of the quay, waiting the unloading of the vessel; and it was the driver of one of these that heard David's words as he passed, who turned and surveyed the young pair of travellers with a whimsical smile.

"You can ride along o' me for want of a better, when I'm loaded up—you and the little one, box and all," he said good-humouredly; and David was thankful enough to close with the kind offer.

An hour after saw Ruby seated with glee between David and the driver, who gathered up the reins in his hand and whistled his team into a trot.

"Fine place, Auckland," he said, with a comprehensive wave of his arm. "I'll wager you've never seen so big a place afore. Eight or nine thousand people there, and fine buildings and all."

"Yes, it's jolly big," assented David, not thinking it necessary to explain that he had seen towns that could beat it in size in England; but they could not beat it in beauty. David was old enough to appreciate that fact as each moment revealed the beauty of the city more clearly. Houses clustered round the bay, then climbed in broad, regular lines up the hill behind, for Auckland, as the capital city of New Zealand and the seat of Government, had been laid out with the due care that befitted such honours.

Behind, range after range of hills, curiously volcanic in formation, stretched away to the blue horizon, and below was the land-locked harbour flecked with mountainous islands mirrored in broken outline in the rippling blue sea.

"You've not told me where you're bound for?"

The question brought David to himself.

"We are going to the Bishop," he said.

"Eh! but he lives way out of the city five miles or more. However, we'll see what comes along."

Presently they were driving along the broad streets, their kind conductor pointing out the principal buildings as they passed, breaking off suddenly in the middle of a sentence with a pleased exclamation.

"Blessed if you aren't in luck's way, youngster. There's the Bishop hisself coming along," he said, bringing up his horses to a sudden standstill, and hailing the Bishop with a wave of his whip, an unceremonious but successful way of attracting his attention.

"There's some one here as wants you, sir."

David sprang to the ground and lifted Ruby out, and then confronted the Bishop.

"I've come as you wished, and brought her along, sir," he said simply.

The Bishop, full of other matters, looked fairly puzzled for a moment; the next, memory returned, and he greeted David with a beaming smile.

"That's right, David Copeland; faithful in much, I see. And this is the little jewel, eh!" with a kindly pat of Ruby's shoulder. "It's a curious chance, or rather Providence, that has brought you here at this particular juncture."

He did not explain what circumstance he referred to, but turning to the man who had brought them, asked him to drop the box at a given house.

"It was lucky that business brought me in to-day. The cart is in for stores, and we will all drive out together. I scarcely expected such promptness in coming. I thought you would be heralded by a letter."

"I've one in my pocket from Folkes," David said, fumbling for the missive.

"Ah! Folkes is a man of action. It's fortunate that you took him into your counsels," said the Bishop, as he glanced through the letter.

"It was he who happened to bring the letters to our home, sir."

In a few minutes the Bishop was driving the two in a very high-wheeled, lightly built cart away from the town on a steadily ascending road towards St. John's College, where the Bishop lived. He spoke but little by the way, and David was glad of the time to look about him and admire the beauties of the bay, which every twist of the track made more apparent. Once he caught the Bishop's face carefully scanning Ruby, but what the searching glance might mean he could not guess.

"There's the College ahead of you," said the Bishop. "That long roofed building is the hall, and the schoolroom is by it, but what is nearest and dearest to our hearts is our little chapel. I dare say the wooden buildings look strange to you at present."

The ground about the college was carefully cultivated, and David saw many dark figures busily at work there. A broad verandah, almost as wide as a room, ran along the Bishop's dwelling-house, and at one end of this, lounging in a cane chair, there rested a tall man with his right leg on a stool before him. His grey hair gave an impression of premature age, but the face beneath was not an old one, the blue eyes

especially were alert and keen. Just now their gaze was concentrated upon the Bishop and the little girl whose hand he held with an intensity that was almost pain, and David, who watched, caught his breath with something like a sob, for all was coming clear to him; the man who lay there with the disabled leg was none other than Ruby's father, and his presence at the College at this particular time must have been the Providence to which the Bishop had alluded. He had dropped the child's hand, and she stood transfixed, gazing with troubled eyes at the outstretched arms and the face twitching with emotion, half fascinated, half frightened, her memory stirred but not thoroughly aroused.

"Ruby, Ruby!" spoke a voice, husky with feeling. "It can't surely be true that Ruby has forgotten poor daddy."

Ruby's little face, so pale before, flushed crimson; with a sudden rush she flew along the verandah, and threw herself sobbing on her father's breast.

"Daddy, daddy!" she almost screamed, "you won't leave Ruby any more, you—you——" and between sobs and incoherent speech it seemed as if memory in its first terrible awakening was a worse enemy to combat than forgetfulness.

But her father's strong arms enfolded her, a caressing hand fondled the curly head, soft words of endearment were whispered in her ear, and the tears that fell upon her face roused the child's

sympathy and diverted her thoughts into another channel.

"Father mustn't cry," she said, checking her sobs. "He hasn't been naughty, has he? Ruby will kiss his eyes and make them well."

David turned away with a lump in his throat, remembering how all unconsciously she had covered the letter with kisses that brought the news that her daddy lived and was anxious to claim her. The Bishop's hand linked itself in his arm.

"Come along, boy, we are not wanted here. I'll show you over the buildings."

As they walked about together, the Bishop told David how, by his special persuasion, Mr. Kempe had consented, when well enough to move, to come down to St. John's to be better nursed and tended than was possible in his isolated home.

"He'll be lame all his life, poor fellow. There was no help near when first he broke his leg, and he could only bind it up in splints himself as well as he was able, and trust to time to set the bone, and it has set after a fashion; but he'll limp more or less, as the leg that was broken is shorter than the other. Fever supervened when first he got here, or before now he would have sailed for New Plymouth in search of Ruby."

"Will her coming on him suddenly like that make him ill again?"

"I think not; joy does not often kill," the

Bishop said. "I am more anxious about that excitable little creature, Ruby, but we must keep her very quiet for the next day or two. My wife will look after her."

David's heart sank; his mission was fulfilled, and there remained nothing for him to do, apparently, but get back again as quickly as possible.

"Was it here George lived?" David asked, with sudden change of subject.

A group of merry Maori lads at play brought his friend back to his memory.

"Yes," said the Bishop; "and he was one of the most promising lads I had. It was sore trouble to me, and the boy, too, when Wi-Kingi insisted upon his return."

"Why did he go? Wi-Kingi is not his father."

"Oh no; his father was killed in some inter-tribal war years ago, but Wi-Kingi is his next of kin, and therefore to be obeyed."

"He told me he was a gentleman," David said, with a laugh.

"Well, so he is, if his title for gentility rests on a long pedigree. The native chiefs can trace their pedigree back for hundreds of years, and are very proud of it; but George is more than that. He is honest, truthful, and pure, and very gentle mannered—all traits that of a nature's gentleman as I take it."

Much more the Bishop told him, as they walked about together, of the Maoris and their training.

Then he went on to talk of that wide mission to the Melanesian islands far away, and how he cruised amongst them in a Mission ship.

"Please God, if I live another year, I trust to be able to hand on that branch of my work to my saintly fellow-helper, Patteson," he ended. "He is away in the islands, now."

"It sounds just like a tale," David said, drawing a deep breath.

"Thank God, it's more than that; it's a splendid reality. "It's glorious work, but it needs heroic men to do it."

"Like Folkes," said David.

"I sometimes thought he might have been one of them, but God, perhaps, has other work for him to do, or—the call will come."

Then, with a kindly nod, David was dismissed, for other business pressed; and David sauntered at his leisure back to the house, his mind full of all the Bishop had told him.

Mr. Kempe was still there, but Ruby, tired out with excitement, lay fast asleep in his arms. He beckoned David to the chair by his side.

"Come and tell me about her; but we'll talk softly, lest we wake her. The child is just worn out," he said, looking down at her with unutterable tenderness. "But first, I must thank you and yours for all you've done for her. It's a debt that cannot be paid."

"Oh, it's nothing," David said bluntly, "because we didn't want to let her go, Mary and I."

"That's 'Mother Mary,' Ruby chatters about, I suppose. Your real mother, I suppose?"

"No, my sister."

Then bit by bit the story of Ruby's rescue was told in brief simplicity, and through it all it was easy to see David's deep affection for Ruby.

"I'm starting home to-morrow. You'll come and spend the summer with us," said Mr. Kempe. "Indeed, my home is yours as long as you choose to make it so."

"I should like to see where Ruby will live," David said

"It's fifty miles up country, too far away from civilization to let a child run wild without a mother," said Mr. Kempe. "What I shall do I cannot decide at present, but dearly as I love the place, I fear I shall have to give it up for Ruby's sake."

"And go to England?" asked David; but the quick spasm of pain that passed over Mr. Kempe's face, made him regret the question.

"No, not England, I think. I was willing to let Ruby be educated there, because her mother wished it, but now that she has been given back to me almost by a miracle, I shall not part from her; I must make her a home not far from here. There must be surely some one in Auckland who can bring up the child like a lady."

The sun, low down in the west, trailed glittering skirts of glory in the bay, his setting apparently the signal for the gong, the sound of which

brought in the boys from every part of the settlement. The Bishop also stepped out from his study and passed quickly down the verandah.

"Supper?" said David, laconically.

"No, prayers," answered Mr. Kempe. "Supper comes next. They have prayers twice a day. You might think it would sicken the boys, and so it would, except that the Bishop lives the life he teaches. Lend me your shoulder, David; I'll go myself to-night," and he limped towards the chapel with sleeping Ruby in his arms.

It was more than twenty years since he had entered a place of worship.

CHAPTER IX

IN WONDERLAND

"WE'RE nearly home at last," said Mr. Kempe, and David lifted wondering eyes, considered carefully where the home might be, unless in the tops of the trees which surrounded them on every side.

The bullocks, with much turning and careful manipulation, were turned out of the beaten track apparently into the very heart of the bush.

"Our private drive," said Mr. Kempe, smiling a little; "ploughed up, I must confess, by winter rains."

The dray with creaking remonstrance sank in to the axles of the wheels in the ruts on either side, bumped over logs of wood left along the track, emerged for a moment on to drier ground, to wallow presently again in a sea of mud. Up above a sky of blue so intense, that Davie's eyes closed as he tried to look up at it, and sunshine too, was there, if only he could see it, but the bush was so thick on either side that it could only

filter through in a sort of golden glow, that showed the vivid colouring of sprouting fern and creeper, for spring was in the air. The two miles that divided Mr. Kempe's clearing from the beaten track took them an hour to traverse, so rough was the way, but David was wholly unprepared for what he would find upon arrival, an oasis of beauty that fairly took his breath away. For ten acres or more the trees had been felled, save where some huge giant too big to tackle had been left standing. A few rough fences prevented the cows and sheep from straying into the bush, and the tinkling of the bells hung round their necks mingled pleasantly with the sound of water rushing. The house, a large gabled cottage of wood, was built about a hundred yards away from a steep bank which descended precipitously to a river below, a noisy tumbling river, breaking in cascades over huge stones, broadening in the distance into the proportions of a lake, and finally hidden from view by a projecting bluff. There was a fenced-in garden round the house, where English spring flowers blossomed. In the rich grass near by a few tame goats browsed. Even the stumps of trees were things of beauty, covered as they were at present with budding clematis and hart's tongue fern, whose glossy leaves caught and held the sunshine. The bush which hid this homestead from the world was alive with sound. There wild pigeons cooed, and parroquets and kakas tried with shrill vehemence to secure the last

word, for it was nesting time, and there seemed much to say of it. Over the river, wild duck, grey and blue in plumage. It seemed to David a haunt for animals and birds, but a man advancing across the place with long slow stride, reminded him that it was also an Englishman's home. This man was English, too, although his bushman's dress struck David's eye as oddly foreign and fantastic. He wore a bright red shirt, leather breeches, and a broad leather belt, and on his shaggy head a rough felt hat. He looked considerably older than Mr. Kempe, whom he greeted with terse civility, but his weather-beaten face was alight with tenderness when he caught sight of Ruby, who with a joyous laugh stretched out her arms to be lifted from the dray.

"Why, bless my soul! if it ain't the little maid!"

For a moment the child's dark head rested against the grey one; then she turned her face and kissed him.

"Please, Jimmy, let me go. Where's Sally gone?" And, released, she ran across the grass towards the house.

"Sally! Sally!" she called, high and shrill; and, in answer to the call, a tall, dark girl, in white draperies, flitted along the verandah, caught Ruby in her arms, and, sinking to the floor, drew the child on to her lap, caressing her with a torrent of words half Maori and half English.

Mr. Kempe followed hard behind. Was it

the effort of walking that made his breath come fitfully, or the terror that Ruby's next cry would be for the mother who was no longer there?

Ruby glanced up with a little rippling laugh. "Sally's glad, daddy, 'cause I've come home. Now, we'll find mammy. She can't walk, you know;" and she slipped her hand into her father's.

With dry lips Mr. Kempe tried to answer her, but no words would come, and he suffered Ruby to lead him through the house. How could words avail? Sooner or later the child must find out that there was no mammy there. Presently Ruby stopped before a closed door, and knocked upon it with impatient hands.

"Open it, daddy; mammy is asleep," she said petulantly.

"Poor child! God help her!" groaned Mr. Kempe, as he unlatched the door.

Ruby sprang into the room, then stood silent, puzzled, wondering, her great eyes searching every hole and corner for the mother that was not there. The rosy face paled and quivered. Sally stood in the doorway, watching with mournful eyes, not daring to enter, unable to go away.

"Daddy, tell me, where's mammy gone to? I *can't* remember!" And with a little wail of despair, Ruby threw herself on the floor, hiding her face.

She did not know that the question was the final triumph of recovered memory, the evidence

of a mind that had regained its balance; but Mr. Kempe recognized it thankfully as he stooped to raise her.

"Come away, darling; we'll talk of this later."

"No, now, now," Ruby insisted, lifting tear-filled eyes. "Where's mammy gone to?"

"I don't know, Ruby; but she's gone away," he said drearily; "and you must try and be good without her."

It was poor comfort, and the child felt it so.

"Sally knows, p'raps;" and then her curious self-restraint broke down, and she began to cry.

"Here, Sally, can't you comfort her?" said Mr. Kempe, helplessly; and the beautiful Maori girl came and knelt beside her.

"Hush, pet, hush, little chattering bird! Tell Sally what ails you."

The words fell softly, slowly, one by one; for Sally could speak English from long contact with the English lady who had "gone home."

For the third time Ruby unsteadily demanded where mammy had gone to, and the answer came swift and promptly.

"Home."

"What home?" Ruby demanded.

The answer was long in coming, and was spoken a little doubtfully—

"Our Father, which art in Heaven."

"Up there?" and Ruby's finger pointed to the blue. "Did our Father *make* her go?"

"He called her."

"Did you hear Him?" asked Ruby, with frightened eyes. "A great, loud voice like thunder?"

"He whispered, and she went."

"You're sure she's there?"

"Surely she is there."

"Will Ruby go to her? Will our Father whisper when he wants *me?*"

"I not sure; I think so." And Sally turned half appealingly to Mr. Kempe.

"Ruby, come with daddy now," he said, rather huskily. "We'll find where David's got to."

David, meanwhile, well content to be left to himself, followed after Jimmy, who was unyoking the bullocks, and turning them out to pasture.

"You need not stand staring at me like that with your hands in your pockets. You can help if you like," said Jimmy, a little gruffly; and David, laughing, set to and lent the hand that was asked for.

"Hem! not bad for a new chum," Jimmy commented.

"How do you know I'm new?"

"I wasn't born yesterday," Jimmy said, smiling grimly. "You can't open your mouth without one's knowin' you've come straight from England—Devonshire born and bred."

"How long is it since you were there?"

"You won't lose nothing for want of asking, will you? I've been knocking about New Zealand since 1841, close on twenty years."

"And never once been home?"

"Never once; nor wanted to. What do you want more than this? There's room to move and breathe, and you've got the place to yourself. You make your living and a little over, enough to live on when working days are done."

"Where *do* you live?" David asked.

"In a hut up yonder, as cosy as you please."

"All alone?"

"I don't look like a family man, now do I? Listen, boy. A man's a free man till he gets a wife. What does he want one for? There's nothing a man can't do better than a woman, if he sets his mind on it."

"But you're fond enough of Ruby," laughed David, "and she'll be a woman some day."

"Yes, worse luck; but they're pretty whilst they're young; good enough to play with."

"But you won't leave off loving her when she's big," David persisted.

"That's all you know about it," said Jimmy, turning on his heel. And David went away smiling, conscious that he had the best of the argument.

Quite late that evening, when the stars were hanging like silver lamps out of the sky, David sat with Mr. Kempe in the verandah, whilst he smoked. Silence reigned now in the bush, broken only by the rush of the river below. David's head was full of the strange day's experiences, most of all his thoughts turned upon the silent

surly man who was content with a life like this.

"Who's Jimmy?" he asked at last. "What's his surname, and why does he hate women so?"

"Jim Cornish, the man who runs this place with me, a diamond, though a rough one. Now, I suppose, you want to know how we have come to throw in our fortunes together."

"Yes, if you like to tell me," David said.

"It is bound up with the story of another man called Robertson, who made this place what you see it. He came out in the rebound from a love affair. He lived in the neighbourhood where my home was, and was engaged to a very beautiful girl; but on the day fixed for the wedding she broke off the engagement, assigning as the reason, that she loved, and intended to marry, the man who was to have been Robertson's best man at the wedding ceremony."

"What a beastly sneak the fellow must have been."

"That's what most people said. I was a boy at the time, but I well remember the excitement it caused in the neighbourhood. Robertson was hard hit, and the next that was heard of him was that he had gone to New Zealand, and Cornish, his groom, went with him. They arrived in Auckland at a time when a man might buy land from a native chief inclined to sell without the intervention of Government, and

Robertson, who had money of his own, set his heart on making himself a home far enough away from the haunts of man to satisfy one sickened with the world. And this twenty acres of bush was redeemed by him, and he made the place what you see it."

"But when did you come?" David asked.

"When I was two-and-twenty. By that time I had made a fine mess of things at home, a tale that neither profits you to hear nor me to tell; but the end of it was that I was shipped off to the colony to go to the dogs a little faster than I should have done in England. It's the steady-going chaps that have a chance out here. Anyway, after I had been in Auckland a month or two, I had spent my last penny and began to be in want. Pray God that you may never know the hunger that makes a man, born a gentleman, watch other men eat until he has to turn away his eyes lest he should fly at them like a starving dog, and tear a crust from them. One day, as I stumbled along up country, not caring greatly whether I lived or died, a man passed me riding on a horse, bidding me good-day. It may have been something in the voice with which I answered him that made him look round. He dismounted and came back a step. 'Strikes me you're starving,' he said. I looked up, prepared to give him a rough answer, and saw it was Robertson who spoke to me. He took me home with him, and from that day to the day in which

he was killed by the falling of a tree, there was never any talk of our separating. I found that he had left all his money to me and Cornish, and Jimmy and I, by mutual consent, stay here as partners working the land together. The only thing we ever had words about was when I told him I meant to marry. He was a worse woman-hater than his master had been. My wife was a little English girl straight out from home, whose parents were dead, and who was going to join a cousin in the bush. She never went. I met her in Auckland, she joined *me* instead, and I think that she was happy. She always said so. She never was strong, and after Ruby came, she flagged. I was well nigh in despair when our strong English servant married, but Jimmy, who from eyeing my wife askance, had become simply devoted to her, went on pilgrimage to a Maori *pa* some ten miles distant, and came back with Sally, then a pretty shy Maori girl of about thirteen, fresh from a missionary school. She could talk a little English, and had been trained in English ways. That established a bond between us and the Maoris, who come and go as they like, and are our firm friends. They came at first to see if Sally was properly treated, but soon we were overwhelmed with offers of girls who should live with us! But we never made a second venture. We drive a pretty brisk trade with them in exchange and barter: so now you know the story of our miscellaneous household."

Mr. Kempe ended abruptly. Presently he rose. A late moon was showing a big disc above the trees, flooding the clearing with mysterious light.

"Come a little way, and I will show you where my wife lies," he said, and supported by a stick, he led David across the dewy paddocks to a spot fenced off carefully on the confines of the bush. A tall St. Andrew's cross, made of two young saplings, stood in the centre of the plot which was kept like a garden, and in the bark was cut with a pocket knife the name "Rose." David took off his cap.

"She died quite suddenly, without benefit of clergy," said Mr. Kempe, when they turned back to the house; "but if ever a woman deserved the name of saint, it was my poor little wife. The only thing she ever fretted over was Ruby's future; so I did with her that which I believed she would like best—I sent her home to Rose's married sister. But now I'll look after her myself. Before another winter I shall move somewhere nearer Auckland."

They returned to the house in silence, and Mr. Kempe led the way to the tiny room where David was to sleep.

"I thought it right that you, who brought Ruby back, should know something of her story, but—it won't be necessary to speak of it again."

The flickering candle that he handed David revealed deep lines of pain round eyes and

mouth, and the eyes themselves were dim with unshed tears. David took the candle with almost unseemly haste and shut the door. It must be awful to feel like that, he thought, but ten times worse if any one noticed it.

Day followed day, and still there was no talk of David's going home. Until Mr. Kempe's leg grew stronger Jimmy was thankful for the boy's help upon the land, and David learned much of real bush life, for he and Jimmy had many a wander through the bush when work was slack, and David soon learned the trail of different animals, wild pigs and cows; for animals that strayed into the bush were seldom recovered, Jimmy told him, and it was the bushmen's most exciting pastime to hunt them down. Of Maoris and their ways, too, David gathered much from personal observation and from frequent talks with Sally. Thus far, at present, there was none of the vague threatenings that made life in Taranaki so uneasy. White men and dark lived side by side in harmony and good-will, and in the Maori *pa* which David visited the Bishop's name was a familiar household word. It was here that an English clergyman and his wife had been stationed for some time, and most of the Maoris living there were baptized Christians, their hearts virgin soil that bore the fruit of simple faith and child-like piety.

Then came a night when David's sense of security and peace received a rude awakening.

He and Ruby had been playing a game of hide and seek, but it was Sally finally who captured the child and carried her off to bed. It was late in November, and the days had lengthened. Often after sunset David made his way to the edge of the precipice which overhung the river, and lying down on the grass he would peer over at the tossing river below. There he would see mirrored the last faint gleam of sunset, followed almost directly by the twinkling stars. Not yet had he grown accustomed to the brief New Zealand twilight. And to-night as he lay watching, there seemed to cross the river a sudden shower of silver light, and, turning to look above, David saw a shower of falling stars, mystic, wonderful, that left a track of light behind them. Once, twice, thrice it was repeated, and David found it hard to decide which was the more beautiful, the spangled shower above, or the river that pictured it, and he broke into a shout, hoping that Mr. Kempe in the verandah would hear his call and join him. Then he was startled by a sort of shuddering sigh just behind him, and turning quickly he saw Sally, who had cast herself upon the ground and hidden her face in terror.

"Sally, Sally, look up and see how beautiful the stars are. I never saw shooting-stars like that before. Where's the master?"

Then Sally rose, and in the half-light David saw the mournful pathos written on her face.

"Is Ruby naughty? Doesn't she love you to-night?" he asked, for at times Ruby traded on the girl's devotion.

"Ah no!" she said; "but see how angry the good God is, how he shows spears of light in the sky to show us war is coming!"

"Oh no; Sally, you don't understand," said David, talking in Maori now to make his meaning plain. "Those are only shooting-stars."

"God sends them shooting," persisted Sally. "He's hurling stones at us, because He's angry with the Maori men who want to fight."

"Who wants to fight?" David said.

"Maoris far away," said Sally, with a sweep of her arm. "There comes creeping, creeping to the *pa* a man tired, hungry from long journey through the bush, and the message he brings is that Maoris should fight the Pakeha."

"But they won't listen," David said.

Sally gave a faint gesture, expressive of doubt.

"David, David," sang out Mr. Kempe from the verandah. "Come away in to supper."

He did not treat David's story seriously.

"The Maoris are a strangely superstitious lot," he said. "Any great atmospheric change affects them. Even Sally, with all her English education, will be moody and out of sorts on a stormy day; and any sign in the heavens, a comet, a shower of falling stars, or an aurora such as we

had in August, they always regard as a direct message to make them ready for war. You can't argue it away. It's an inborn superstition."

"Then you don't think war is really coming?"

Mr. Kempe laughed. "Ask me another, David. How can I tell, buried fifty miles away from men and politics? War ought not to come, for Maoris, though high-spirited, are very amenable and loyal if you treat them right."

Next day, to Mr. Kempe's deep regret, David spoke of going home.

"You are not letting Sally's words influence you, are you?"

"I don't know," said David; "but they've made me think of Mary, and if trouble is ahead I ought to be there to help her."

"Well, it's the stripling sometimes we are told that beheads the giant, or else you are not a very big defender, David."

"I have a feeling that she wants me," said David, simply.

"Well, my boy, if you feel that, I will not be the one to stop you," Mr. Kempe said. "You'll tell Mr. Godwin and 'Mother Mary' that two hundred pounds will be placed at the New Plymouth Bank, a faint, very faint acknowledgment for their goodness to my Ruby; and if and when 'Mother Mary' gets tired of you, can't you come back for good? Now, or years hence, you will be always welcome."

A week later David, with his bundle on his

back, lifted the latch of his New Zealand home, Poimena, and the sole visible occupant of the living-room was Mary, cooing and singing at something in her lap, and as David drew near on tip-toe, picturing her surprised welcome, he discovered, to his own utter amazement, that the "something" was a baby!

CHAPTER X

A FRIEND MISUNDERSTOOD

IT would have been hard to decide which was the more surprised, Mary or her brother. He bent and kissed her twice, roused to unusual demonstration.

"Oh, David! one for baby too," said Mary, reproachfully. "It has pleased me so to think that you've got her just when you've lost Ruby."

"I'll wait a bit, Mary," said David, choking with laughter. "There would be about as much sense in kissing a pink indiarubber ball."

"You bad boy! Go back to where you came from!" and Margaret appeared from outside, her arms full of clothes, and her eyes brimming over with laughter.

"You here too! How jolly!" David exclaimed.

"I had no choice about it. Abel came and fetched me. You can see for yourself that Mary is so taken up with that baby that she's fit for nothing else, so I'm here to do the ordinary every-

day work—the washing, baking, and general tidying—leaving Mary to croon over the baby that you won't even kiss. You might stretch a point for your first niece."

But the point was not stretched. Instead he held out a finger, which baby grabbed at and cooed over when caught.

"It will be so long before she's any good. Has it got a name, or is it too small to have one?"

"Joy! Doesn't Joy Godwin sound pretty?" and Mary lifted a radiant face. "At least, that is the name Abel and I have settled upon as soon as we can take her to New Plymouth to be baptized."

"Oh, you've all lost your heads over this small pink thing! You can't even think of a name that will wash and wear, like Mary or Margaret. Joy is just a fancy name."

"Why, she's the thing itself, aren't you, sweet one?"

And the question found answer in the circumstance that Abel, who had just entered, brushed quickly by David and bending over Mary's lap covered the baby with kisses. His greeting to David was less effusive.

"How do, David? You're looking well enough. You're browned and broadened too. Glad to get back again, eh?"

"Very," said David, returning the hand grip.

"I'm glad you're back for harvest. Our first crops are promising."

There was a clatter of cutlery and Margaret's voice called, telling David to lend a hand. There was much chatter over the meal that followed, but that everything was not as merry as the outward seeming David gathered by Abel's face, which when at rest looked careworn and anxious.

"Come and look round. We've got a fine show of pigs and poultry," said Abel after dinner; and the two walked off together.

"I'm glad you're back, David, if only for Mary's sake. She's not as strong as she was, and when I have to go down to New Plymouth from time to time, I like to feel she's got one of her own about her. The two young men are good enough, but it's not the same as a brother. The truth is, that though I don't say much to her about it, several things have happened lately that make me troubled."

"What?" questioned David.

"I don't know that it's serious, but those Maori chaps are up to their monkey tricks. Scarcely a night passes that I don't find some damage done. Sometimes it's fences broken down, another day every egg has been taken."

"Stolen do you mean?"

"No; destroyed from mere spite. You find the broken shells all over the place. We've to watch almost incessantly to bring off a brood of chickens."

They were close to the wired-in place which protected the poultry when Abel, flushing with fierce anger, came to a sudden halt.

"Confound them! They've been at it again! In broad daylight this time!"

There was certainly just cause for his anger, for there, laid in a neat row, lay eleven fluffy chickens, with their necks wrung.

"What a cruel, brutal shame," said David, every whit as angry as Abel.

"And the worst of it is, that I'm afraid the ring-leader, the imp who works this mischief, is the boy you set such store by," Abel said. "George, do you call him?"

"I can't see why on earth you should fix on him when there's not a shadow of evidence against him. He did his level best to prevent your coming, you'll remember," said David, hotly.

"Just a blind, don't you see? to keep us off the land. That wily old Wi-Kingi put him up to it."

"But it's not fair play to condemn a chap without a hearing. Who has seen him break the fences or smash the eggs?"

"Nobody, actually, or he would have had the hiding that he deserves; but the other fellows have seen him often skulking in the bush, and always afterwards something annoying has been done, either by him or by one of his accomplices."

"But the Bishop knows him, brought him up

in fact, and says he's about as good as you make them," David said, firing his last shot.

Abel smiled. "Your Bishop is a first-rate fellow; nobody denies it; but about the natives everybody also agrees that he's rather a crank! He has Maoris on the brain; the black men are always right and the white men always wrong," Abel said, rather bitterly. "It's a craze shared by really level-headed fellows like Folkes, too."

"Well, I know George better than any of you," said David, "and I think it's a beastly shame to fix this thing on him without a jot of evidence."

"I hope you're right and I wrong, but anyway when next you come across George, I'll be obliged if you will let him know that I sleep with a pistol under my pillow, which I'll use the first time I find a Maori skulking around my premises at night. You may laugh, David, but there are anxious times ahead. Things look very ugly. That pestilent Wi-Kingi has written a most insolent letter to the Governor, who has waited all these months to clinch the bargain made with Te-Teira, the chief who was willing to sell land at that March meeting, you remember. A hundred pounds of the promised money has been paid this month, but the day before the payment Wi-Kingi came swaggering into the town with about thirty followers, and informed the Land Commissioner that even if the money were paid, he should never allow the purchase to be completed, although he

owned before witnesses that the land in question did not belong to him but to Te-Teira. Folkes was present at the interview, and has told me about it, so I know it's true. I expect there will be a pretty row when it is proposed to survey the new purchase. Depend upon it, there will be no peace or safety for settlers until this land league business is broken up."

"Safety?" cried David, catching at the word. "You don't think there's real danger, do you?"

"I don't know. I've pooh-poohed it up till now, as you know; but when it comes to having a baby of your own, it makes a man nervous," and Abel gave a half-ashamed laugh.

So it was that pink baby that was destroying Abel's nerve and temper, David thought. It was a true instinct that had brought him home: he was needed to take care of Mary and to clear his friend George from what he was certain was a most unjust imputation.

Not many days later he came across the Maori boy in the bush, where he was looking for a horse that had wandered away. There was a half-frightened look in George's eyes that disappeared as David gave his hand.

"Friend David, you did not well to go away; you're wanted here."

"Yes, I think I am; and George, it is not well, either, that your people come about our place to break our fences and murder our chickens.

Abel means them no harm, but he is very angry now."

"George has not done it," said the boy, laying his hand on his breast.

"No, I know you have not, but some of your people have."

"I came—I came many times to find you, but you stayed away, you and the little maid."

"I took her to her father; we have found him," David said, feeling there was no time for further explanation. "Now, listen, George. The best thing you can do is to keep away from this place altogether, you and your people too."

"I will not. If Wi-Kingi means you harm, I come to tell you."

David's searching glance swept George's face, wondering if this seeming friendliness were treachery; then his eyes dropped, ashamed of the passing suspicion.

"You keep away, George; you'll get yourself into trouble if you don't," he said kindly.

"Yet I will come," George answered simply, and the next moment the waving bush hid him from sight.

It was David's special mission after this to keep particular watch over the cattle and poultry. He had had enough intercourse with the Maoris lately to prevent his being afraid of them, and was aware that their method was rather to steal a march upon the white man than to attack him openly.

About three months passed by without much further annoyance. Either the Maoris had accepted the warning sent through George, or the increased watchfulness on the settlement hindered any intended mischief. The small crops which were carried and stored for the summer had been particularly fine. Margaret Godwin still lingered at the farm, for Mary was not strong, and the care of her baby seemed all that she was fitted for. So occupied were the inmates of the farm with their own concerns, that the only outside news that reached them came through Folkes, who rode out from time to time from New Plymouth.

One afternoon, about the middle of February, whilst Margaret milked the cows, he rode in, his horse's steaming flanks showing that he had come in haste. Margaret looked up from her work with a smile, then hid her face against the side of the cow milked, afraid lest she should betray how glad she was to see her friend again.

"Letters?" she asked. "We have come to regard you in no other light than the family postman."

Folkes had leaped from his horse and stood with one hand resting half caressingly on the creature's neck.

"No; I've come for no other reason than to see you," he said abruptly.

There was silence, save for the swish of the milk as it foamed into the pail. Folkes would

have given much to catch one glimpse of Margaret's face, but he could only catch the burnished gold on the thick coil of hair, and trace the pink colour that crept beyond the small ears to the nape of the white neck.

"I'm off to-morrow, Margaret, on what may prove a rather dangerous mission. This Waitara business presses for settlement, and will very soon be decided by force, I am afraid. A man on the staff of the land commission called Tracey has offered to make an unofficial survey of the block, which will lead him into the heart of the disaffected district. He is a capital fellow, but, knowing nothing of the language, has given unwitting offence on more than one occasion to the Maoris, whom he treats in high-handed English fashion, so I've asked to accompany him, just for the fun of the thing."

At last Margaret's beautiful face was upturned to his.

"In order that you may get tomahawked instead of him," she said impetuously.

"In order to save him from any risk of being tomahawked," Folkes said, smiling down at her. "You see, I can talk the language and know many of the natives. Unless unreasonably provoked, I do not think they would harm me."

"Why could not you go without telling me?" Margaret asked.

"Because I wanted you to know—and think of me."

He said "think," but Margaret felt that the true interpretation of the word was "pray."

"I will," she said softly.

"I want you to know everything, good or bad, that shall happen to me now or ever, Margaret. I should be sorry now that any danger or accident should befall me without your knowing that life has become precious to me, because I love you better than life itself. Do you remember the first time that I saw you? You were giving David a lesson in milking, and when you looked up I knew that I'd met my fate."

"What nonsense!" said Margaret, between tears and laughter. "I don't believe in love at first sight."

"The feeling was not mutual, then? I believe in it, because I've gone through it. It's evident that my love is unreturned. You've only got to say you don't love me, and—I will go away."

The voice that spoke was harsh and strained. Margaret had risen and faced Folkes, a playful smile trembled on her lips.

"You jump at conclusions, like a hasty girl. I didn't love you when you came that day. I should have been properly ashamed of myself. I'm just a little ashamed of confessing even now that I do."

"Margaret! Margaret darling!" And there and then the girl was caught to Folkes's breast and held there, whilst he showered kisses on her hair.

A cough behind them brought them back to earth and their senses.

David, unseen of either, had come across the paddock towards them, and his cough was the sound that warned them of his presence. It would be hard to say whether he or the pair that he surprised were the more embarrassed. He was the first to speak.

"I'm awfully sorry, you know. I couldn't help it. I hadn't a notion you—went on like that?"

The words were spoken with an accent of reproach. Folkes broke into merry laughter, and taking Margaret's hand held it fast.

"You live and learn, David; and by accident you've seen how silly a man can be when first he learns that the girl he loves loves him in return."

It was a situation that did not appeal to David.

"Oh, that's it, is it?"

It was Margaret's turn to laugh. "So like a boy! You are not pleased one little bit, David, and we've been such friends."

"Oh yes, I'm pleased all right, but—I hadn't expected it. Do the others know?"

"They've not had the chance; it's only just happened; and I think I will not tell them until I've spoken to Margaret's father and mother, which I mean to do on my way back. Can you hold your tongue, David?"

David did not even vouchsafe an answer, but turning sauntered off to the house, specially careful not to look behind him. It was odd that a

man and a girl could not be good friends without making fools of themselves, he thought, a little fretfully. For the time being his hero-worship had suffered a grievous shock; but the sense that he and Margaret shared a common secret made his manner to her specially friendly that evening, a friendliness which Margaret returned by confiding to him the story of Folkes's purposed mission on the morrow, and her own misgiving concerning it.

The next morning, when the sun was risen just sufficiently to flood the horizon with colour, David heard soft fingers moving across his window. He sprang out of bed and opened it, and saw George standing there.

"Go away!" he whispered; "you are mad to do it! Abel sleeps with a pistol under his pillow."

But George did not even turn his head to see if any one else had heard him come to the house.

"Come with me," he said; and that he spoke in Maori showed that he had not time to consider his words. "I wait for you in the bush."

He slipped away across the clearing, nor did David draw breath freely until he was lost to view. Then he threw on his clothes, jumped out of the window, and made his way after him.

It was some time before he could piece George's story, told half in English and half in Maori, into a connected whole. Then he gathered that Tracey and Folkes's proposed expedition was known to Wi-Kingi, and that a party of his

followers was deputed to lie in ambush and await them.

"What would they do to them?" David asked. "They would not dare to kill them."

"I know not, but we must not let them go. I know a short way through the bush that will bring us to the track by which they ride. We must get there and turn them back," said George. "They may not believe a Maori, but the word of a white boy they will trust."

David's face hardened into quick resolve. No effort must be spared to save his friend; to return to the house would be to betray George's presence, and very possibly Abel would offer to go instead of him. No, he would defer all explanation until he came back, bringing the glad news of Folkes's safety.

"Go ahead!" he said, with a forward gesture; and George, raising a beckoning hand, disappeared in the bush. The training David had received from Jimmy in following a trail stood him in good stead now as he panted breathlessly after George through tangled bush and fern far higher than his head, falling now and again prone over some monster forest tree whose trunk, laid low by the winter's storm, was hidden in the fern and thick undergrowth. He was not sorry when, after an hour's struggle through the forest, they emerged at the foot of a hill, which they skirted through swampy ground, where not unfrequently they sank in to their knees or rolled over on some

mossy boulder. This brought them to a river, shallow and wide, which they waded without much effort; but a mile further on they encountered it again, narrow and deep—a whirling torrent rushing between high rocky banks. The only method of crossing it was a small tree trunk thrown from one bank to the other.

George threw a backward glance. "Follow?" he said, interrogation in his voice.

"Yes," said David, knowing, as he said it, that one false step would hurl him into the foaming river below. Happily the trunk was covered with rough bark to which his feet could cling, and keeping his eyes straight ahead of him the river was crossed in safety.

"Is it much farther?" he asked, for he was getting spent. He had not broken his fast that day, and the physical strain was telling on him.

"An hour and we are there," said George, forging ahead.

Once more they passed into the bush. David's face and hands were scratched and bleeding; to the tired boy it seemed as if George wriggled his way through the tangle with the swiftness and ease of a snake; but by strenuous effort he managed just to keep his ever-advancing figure in view. A broad streak of sunshine showed that they were nearing the track where they hoped to intercept Folkes and his friend, when across their ears there fell the sound of a horse's hoofs galloping rapidly. There was a singing in

David's ears. With one final effort he tried to hurry his steps to a run, but his tired feet caught in the fern and he fell forward, hearing as he fell an Englishman's voice shouting words of execration, followed by the cracking of a pistol shot. David staggered to his feet, a wild fear possessing him that, on gaining the track, now close at hand, he might find George lying dead at his feet; but when he reached it, dazed and trembling, there was no sign of George, but towards New Plymouth there galloped a horseman, whose white strained face was turned backward, to see if he were followed, and behind came another horse, terrified, snorting, and alas! riderless.

David's heart stood still, for across his mind there flashed the terrible conviction that Tracey had effected his escape, but that Folkes was left a captive in the hands of the Maoris. George, unhurt, rose slowly from the bed of fern where he had lain in shelter, and touched him on the arm.

"The good God kept me safe," he said, answering the unspoken terror in David's eyes.

"But Folkes?" asked David, with dry lips.

"Harm has come to him. We go to find him," George answered, already moving on; and David limped after with shuddering onward glance, fearing that each step might reveal the dead body of his friend lying across the track. George came to a sudden pause, pointing with his finger to a spot where there was evident sign of a struggle. The ground about was trampled

with many footprints, and in the centre was a dark patch of blood, not long since shed.

David's courage snapped, and with a groan of horror he threw himself upon the ground, digging his nails into the soft earth to keep back the choking, tearless sobs. This, then, was the end of it all! The friend whom he almost worshipped had been betrayed and murdered by the very men whose cause he had always espoused. Never, never would he forgive the awful deed! He wished himself a man, that he might go out and fight them. There was fierce murder in David's heart as he lay there. Then George's hands lifted him and set him on his feet.

"Go home and wait; I can save the Pakeha. He is not dead. If he were, he would lie here pierced through and through. Go home; I, George, will send him back to you, by God's good will."

CHAPTER XI

VINDICATED

FOLKES had started on his expedition that morning with a foreboding of coming disaster that he tried in vain to shake off. So strong was his conviction that mischief would result from the journey, that on the plea of knowing the track far better than his companion, he managed to keep some little way ahead of him, and his keen eyes kept constant watch on the bush by the side and before them, on the alert to detect any sign of Maoris in ambush. He was sufficiently familiar with their ways of progress to be able to distinguish between the even sweep of the wind across the scrub that edged the forest, and the peculiar sinuous movement caused by a party of Maoris making their silent way through the bush.

Wishful to keep their mission as quiet as possible, they had started away from New Plymouth soon after daybreak, and had travelled a good many miles before Folkes called a sudden halt.

"What's up? Want to light a pipe?" asked Tracey, carelessly.

"Maoris!" answered Folkes, pointing with his hand; "a lot of them moving along there. We'd best get back as quick as we can!"

"Pack o' nonsense!" said Tracey, impatiently. "As if they knew what we are here for. One Englishman is worth a dozen darkies." And before Folkes knew what he intended to do, he brushed by, giving his horse a stinging cut with his whip, and darted onward. Yet his hand sought his pistol as he galloped ahead.

Instantaneously the bush in front of him, about a hundred yards off, became alive with dark forms that seemed to him as if they sprang from out of the earth; a black band that stretched from the bush right across his track, warning him by violent gesticulation to turn back. Tracey misinterpreted their action as a declaration of warlike intent, and fired. Then he felt Folkes's panting horse alongside his own, and a firm hand was laid upon his bridle, whilst his horse's head was wheeled round in the direction of New Plymouth.

"You fool!" hissed Folkes in his ear, "you will have the whole pack upon us. Fly for your life!"

Tracey needed no second bidding, but putting spurs to his horse was soon able to put himself out of the range of the Maori fire, for they rarely desert the shelter of the bush. Folkes would have followed him, but a shot disabled his wrist,

causing him to loose his rein. At the same instant his horse shied, swerving from his course, and Folkes, taken unawares, was unseated and thrown with stunning force to the ground. The horse, set at liberty, set off at a gallop to rejoin his companion, and Folkes awaked from his momentary unconsciousness to find himself surrounded by a threatening circle of dark faces that glared upon him demanding "utu" for the blood which Tracey's random shot had drawn from one of their number. The horror of the probable death that awaited him flashed across his mind as he clambered to his feet, and shook himself free of the many hands stretched out to hold him fast.

"Shoot me outright, but don't mangle my body," he said; "but remember you shoot a friend. I'm known to your chief, Wi-Kingi. He would not wish my death."

His appeal went home; clearly there was a division of opinion among his captors; some still demanded his instant death, but one man, taller than the rest, and evidently in authority, swept aside the disputants with almost insolent arrogance, and gave orders that Folkes's hands should be tied behind his back, and that he should be taken back with them. There was a very riot of joy in Folkes's heart as he pursued his painful march through the bush, a Maori behind and before him to render escape impossible. There did not seem special need for thanksgiving, for the flax cord that bound his hands together cut deeply into his

injured wrist, causing profuse bleeding; but it was just the gift of life that made Folkes glad, the life that was no longer his own, but was to be shared with Margaret, if God should deliver him. Yet, as he stumbled along the trail, faint with pain and loss of blood, his gladness died away in the agony he endured. He fell more than once, to be lifted on to his feet with a sort of grim humour by his captors. It was glad relief when at last they emerged from the forest, where the heat was intensely oppressive, and began to mount by a circuitous path to a pass situate at the top of a hill, the natural terraces of which could be strongly fortified in case of attack. The crest of it had been dug out to some considerable depth, and the earth thrown up as outworks. The large hollow had been levelled, and round it had been constructed a number of *whares*, native huts built of reeds and grass, bound together by flax. They differed considerably in size, and into one of them Folkes was thrust unceremoniously. He lay there for some time betwixt dozing and waking, and was roused from his semi-unconsciousness by a hand passed rapidly across his face. He tried to raise himself, but sank back again helpless.

"Wi-Kingi bids you eat," said a not unfriendly voice in Maori. "He does not wish your death. He thinks the Pakeha will send money to set you free."

"I can't eat," groaned Folkes, "unless you loose my hands."

The man crouched down, rolled Folkes over, and cut the thong which bound him. Even then Folkes found it difficult to move his cramped limbs, and his wounded wrist was swollen past recognition. Happily for him it was his left one. Before him in the dim half light he saw placed upon the floor a green flax basket filled with food; kumaras, a sort of sweet potato, and a goodly portion of meat, which greasy mess Folkes put aside with sick loathing. Kumaras and a curious sort of native bread sufficed to allay his hunger. The man who had brought his meal withdrew whilst he ate it, as it is considered the height of bad manners to watch a stranger eat. Folkes felt sufficiently restored to tear his handkerchief into shreds and bind up his wrist; then he crawled to the very small aperture which served as window and looked about him. A large group of Maoris stood in the centre of the *pa*, and that he was the object of their discussion was proved by the constant glances thrown at the *whare* where he was confined. Any hope of escape was at present impossible, for a Maori squatted on his heels just outside the open door. Presently the man who had come to him before returned. Folkes seated himself upon the mat thrown in the corner of the *whare*, and the man squatted down in front of him.

"Wi-Kingi will let you go for money; much money," he began.

Folkes shook his head. "I don't take a

message like that. Why does not Wi-Kingi come to me himself?"

"He is not here; that is the message he sends."

"A message I will not listen to. Much harm will come of it if he does not set me free."

"He demands 'utu' for the blood the strange Pakeha shed."

"My blood has paid for that," said Folkes, pointing to his wrist; "I am more hurt than he. The shot did but graze his arm."

The man went out again murmuring to himself, and for hours Folkes was left entirely alone, wondering what the end of his adventure would be. Towards sunset he heard strange sounds and shouts, and went once more to the window, and there an uncanny sight awaited him.

Drawn in a straight line across the *pa* was a body of about fifty Maoris, divested of all clothing except a shaggy flax mat which enveloped each one from his loins to his knees, in appearance not unlike the Highland kilt. Each Maori held a beautifully carved spear, and wore on his head a bunch of white feathers. On the ground not far off sat two Maori lads with native drums before them which, at a given signal, they began to beat with the effect of a military tattoo, and then the long line of warlike men broke into frantic movements and gestures, which were regulated nevertheless by a curious order; and Folkes, as he watched the leaping figures and heard the regular thud of their naked feet, knew

that he was witnessing the haka or war dance, which it was the custom to celebrate when the native tribes declared war against each other. Now Folkes feared it was the token of a speedy declaration of war between the Maoris and the white man. More and more furious grew the dance, the whole body of men drawing nearer to the *whare* where Folkes was confined. He could hear the whistle of the brandished spears as they cut the air. The last rays of the setting sun cast a rosy radiance on the nodding plumes, the eyes of the dancers shone like fire with the gathering excitement, and whoops and wild cries marked each step of advance. Folkes could well understand that after a dance such as this these Maoris, with their splendid physique and high courage, might prove dangerous foes. Almost as suddenly as the dance had begun it ended, and the men, exhausted with their exertions, withdrew to their several *whares* for rest and refreshment, and by the sounds which fell upon his ears Folkes imagined that some of them were drinking heavily.

Darkness had fallen, and Folkes tried to get some change of position on the mat spread upon the floor of the *whare*, when he was aware of a stealthy presence close to him. He started to his feet, fearing that some Maori, worked up to frenzy against the Pakeha, had come to murder him; but a warning hand was laid on his arm and another pressed upon his lips.

"Hush! It is George come to save you, but

not yet," whispered a voice. "Here is fresh fern for your bed. Sleep! When the time is ripe I will come;" and before Folkes could even whisper his thanks, George had slipped from the *whare* so quietly that not even the dozing sentinel outside was aware he had come and gone.

The sense of a real friend among the natives, albeit that friend was only a boy, had a steadying effect on Folkes's nerves; he was quite tired out with pain, and with a short inward prayer to God he stretched out his tired limbs on the fragrant fern and slept. What the hour was when he was waked he did not know. With the utmost caution he followed George to the door of the *whare*, creeping along as George bade him upon hands and knees. The Maori who had been told off to keep guard over him had dropped into sound slumber, but he was so close outside that it was only by drawing himself to his full height and edging by him that Folkes avoided touching him. The dark purple dome overhead was lit up by stars whose brilliancy was undimmed by a single cloud, and Folkes knew that the slightest sound that should betray his purpose of escape would deliver him back into the hands of his captors, and yet a certain confidence was in his heart that he would not be recaptured. There came back to his memory the story of St. Peter's escape from the prison with his angel guard, and to him it seemed as if this black boy were God's messenger sent to deliver him. They had passed the "first

ward" successfully, and pressed through two *whares*, from one of which Folkes could clearly define the heavy snores of some warrior whose war fervour had ended in a drunken carouse. Now under the light of the stars they climbed the earth mound by which the *pa* was surrounded, and began their descent down the hill, and at each step Folkes's heart grew lighter, lending wings to his feet so that he had no difficulty in keeping pace with his companion. Once in the scrub they were in comparative safety, but George allowed no slackening of speed. He chose the least familiar trails, and ever and anon looked back to assure himself that Folkes was close at his heels. Not a word was spoken through that wonderful night. By daybreak they had arrived close to the boundaries of the white man's territories, and then George paused and looked up at Folkes with great grave eyes.

"There lies your way; you are safe!" he said. "I leave you. Tell friend David that George kept his word."

"No, no," cried Folkes; "I cannot let you go like that. Come on with me; I will reward you as far as I can for what you have done for me to-night."

"George wants nothing," said the boy. "I go back—to my people."

"You must come with me and stay with me," urged Folkes. "They will kill you if they think you helped me to escape."

"Maybe, then, I will wander on and on till I reach Chem father," said George. "Look! if I came with you, then when war comes I would have to fight against my people; if I return to them they may make me fight the Pakeha. Chem father says that we must fight the devil and all his angels, but not each other. That pleases not the good God."

Folkes held out an unsteady hand. "Then it shall be your work and mine to fight the devil only," he said quietly. "I hope we may meet again. Perhaps I, too, shall go back to the Bishop's school. Good-bye; God bless you."

George did not fully grasp his meaning; he only knew that the white man's face was kind and friendly, and he stood, a silent black figure, watching Folkes until he was out of sight.

The spot to which he had conducted Folkes was but a mile away from Poimena, and before any member of the household was astir, Folkes stood quietly watching the little homestead. The first sign of life within the house was a faint blue line of smoke issuing from the chimney, and Folkes drew near to the window, pressing his tired white face against it. At first he was unseen. Margaret's face was clearly visible in the red fireglow, and Folkes could see the tired sad lines round the mouth and eyes. She turned and saw him, and with a soft cry of joy ran to the window, threw it wide, and the next moment had her arms round his neck, drawing his weary

head upon her shoulder. It seemed to the girl, in that moment of glad thanksgiving, as if Folkes had been hers, and hers only, all her life. There could be no shyness or reserve between this man, restored to her from the grave, and herself. Was she not his promised wife? Presently, still holding his hand, she viewed him at arm's length, breaking into a tender, pitying laugh.

"Come in, come in, you poor battered, bruised man," she said.

"Yes, I'm not a lover for a girl to be proud of," Folkes said, with a half-comical glance at his dishevelled garments.

Margaret's eyes followed his, and caught the stains of blood and the discoloured wrist, and could not restrain a cry of utter dismay.

"Ah! you are hurt; you are horribly hurt," she cried, white to the very lips.

She drew him with gentle violence into the kitchen, and kneeling by his side, ripped up the sleeve of his coat, and, fetching a basin, bathed the wrist with hot water, her tears falling fast the while.

"Don't cry, don't cry, my darling. It's a flea-bite; a hurt that a surgeon's dressing will set right. Nothing matters now we are together;" and Margaret, lifting her tear-stained face to his, kissed him on the forehead.

"The next thing is to rouse the others, and get them to come and groom you," she said, returning to the practical view of the situation.

"Barring the wrist, poor David came back in almost as sorry a plight yesterday. His face and hands will bear the marks of his scramble through the bush for many a day to come, and his clothes were simply in ribbons. I never saw a boy so completely broken down."

"David!" cried Folkes, in astonishment. "What on earth had he to do with it?"

Then rapidly Margaret told him the story, and Folkes listened with softening eyes.

"So it comes to this, that I owe my life on this occasion to the heroism of two boys, and here is one to speak for himself. David, old chap!"

David could not trust himself to speak, but took Folkes's hand and wrung it.

"I was to tell friend David that George had kept his word."

"Yes," cried David, indignation steadying emotion, "and that's the boy that Abel and all of 'em thought a sneaking chap who'd steal eggs and hack chickens. I hope they'll be properly sorry."

"Meanwhile what am I to say to you?"

"Nothing," said David, gruffly. "George bossed the whole thing. I did not even get the chance of giving you the message."

"But you were ready; I'm as much indebted to you as to him."

David slunk away, shamefaced by praise that he was more than doubtful if he deserved.

There was much rejoicing over the family

breakfast that morning; even merriment over the enormous meal that Folkes made.

"Wait until you have been kept for four and twenty hours on Maori food," he said. "It whets your appetite for a meal like this."

It was but the outline of the story that he told them all; they had not time to hear or he to tell it. Its full recital was reserved for Margaret later on. Breakfast over, Folkes asked for the loan of a horse to carry him as far as New Plymouth, where he wished to report his safety.

David found it impossible to settle to work that day after his friend had gone; his ears were strained, listening for something, but what he could not define, even to himself. Was it pure imagination that there was a constant rustling in the bush more than the wind could account for. Half in scorn at his own nervousness he threw down the tool with which he was mending a fence, and took his way by a fairly familiar trail into the heart of the bush. It was not long before he heard the steady advance of footsteps, and, throwing himself down in a bed of fern to escape detection, he watched and waited. Presently through the gloom he saw dusky forms approaching.

His first impression was that Maoris were coming to raid the farm, but he saw that they were making their way beyond it. Women, too, followed their lords and masters with little children slung across their shoulders, and their presence

reassured David not a little, but yet he felt he must discover whither they all wended, and scarcely knowing what he did he followed in their wake. More and more Maoris filed in from various directions, and still David followed on unseen, reckless of danger, filled only with an overpowering curiosity to discover what this strange silent gathering might mean, for never a word was spoken. After some miles through the bush and forest they came to a large clearing near a river through which some attempt at road-making had been begun, and then David realized that he was looking upon the tract of land in the Waitara district about which there had been a year's dispute with Government, and squatted upon it were groups of Maoris, men, women, and children, some hundreds in number, and those whom David had accompanied took their places by the side of the others. David did not leave the shelter of the bush, but, turning his head in the direction of New Plymouth, waited for what should come, for that this large gathering was assembled to checkmate some Government order David was pretty well convinced. He had not long to wait; there came a sound of trotting hoofs, and four men hove in sight: the Chief Land Surveyor, and by his side Folkes, and now David knew why his friend had made so early a start, nor mentioned the mission he was bound for to Margaret lest he should cause her unnecessary alarm. Needless to say, Tracey, who had

blundered so upon the previous occasion, was not one of the four. The two men behind were unknown to David, but arrived upon the clearing, they all dismounted from their horses, began to unpack from their saddle-bags instruments for measuring out the land, and still the natives watched and made no sign; but, at the first endeavour to stretch the chain from one peg to another, they clustered round like angry bees; the pegs were snatched up and thrown away, whilst women's hands held the chain fast with a cackle of angry laughter. Then David saw Folkes haranguing one of the chiefs, evidently trying to bring him to reason, and it was he who made the next effort to measure out the land with exactly the same result except that the Maoris' manner was more threatening than at first. The four Englishmen, baffled in their purpose, stood consulting together for a moment; then the Chief Commissioner summoned the chiefs before him.

"We leave to-day because, like silly children, you do not let us carry through our work, but you have yet to learn that white men cannot be insulted with impunity," he said.

Then, turning to his assistants, he gave the order for the instruments to be repacked. David's heart was thumping like an engine. Four men unarmed, surrounded by this horde of Maoris, would surely be done to death. He could at least strike a blow in their defence, and, leaving his place of concealment, he quietly pushed his

way through the Maoris until he stood at Folkes's side.

"You here!" cried Folkes, more in surprise than pleasure.

"I'm here to help, if needed," said David, reddening a little, and Folkes, appreciating the boy's bravery, smiled down upon him.

"There is no danger," he said kindly, "or we should not be here alone and unarmed. We wished to take peaceable possession, and the Maoris are quietly opposing us. They won't touch us to-day; they are a little bit afraid about yesterday's escapade. Nevertheless, I am not going to leave you here to make your way back alone. Jump up in front of me, and I will drop you at the nearest point to your home. The Maoris, flushed with success, might handle you roughly."

The men that carried the instruments were already on their way, and the Chief Land Commissioner stood quietly talking to one of the chiefs.

"Wi-Kingi is not with you, you say. Please take a message to him from me. Say that the Governor will hold him responsible for this interruption of our work, and must receive a full apology from him in twenty-four hours. Meanwhile, good-day."

David could not but admire the superb coolness of his manner. He mounted his horse, and rode off with never a glance behind, Folkes

following, with David seated in front of him. There was again absolute silence until they were well out of sight; then the air rang with shouts of triumph, in which the shrill voices of women could easily be distinguished from those of the men. The Chief Commissioner glanced back at Folkes.

"That does not sound like apology, does it?"

"And if not, what is the Governor's next move?" Folkes asked.

"Martial law," was the brief answer.

"It will be a big mistake, sir."

The Commissioner shrugged his shoulders. Presently Folkes reined in his horse.

"You are only a mile away, David, across country. Get home as quick as you can and tell Abel, from me, to move into New Plymouth to-morrow at the latest."

David glanced up with startled surprise. "Run away!" he said incredulously.

"Yes, if you choose to call it so. We white men can manage Maoris if only we have patience enough and tact, but, if war is declared, they are very devils, and brave as lions. You forget your sister, and the baby, and"—a long pause—"Margaret."

Just the way in which the name was spoken revealed the passion of love Folkes felt for her; was patent even to David, boy as he was.

"All right!" he said gravely, slipping from his horse. "They shall go to New Plymouth to-morrow;" and Folkes rode on, sure that the boy would keep his word.

CHAPTER XII

WAR

ABEL'S face was grave when he received Folkes's message, but he never for an instant thought of disregarding it.

"Well, I must go in and tell Mary to make ready for the flitting, but it seems a little hard on us, I must say, just when we are beginning to see the fruit of our labours," he said.

"But you'll come back when this row is over," David said.

"God only knows," said Abel, sadly. "Sometimes I think Mary was right, and that I decided to come out here in too much of a hurry."

"Shall you leave the house with no one in it? I'd stay with one of the men," said David, ready to offer practical consolation.

"No, no; we'd best all stick together, I take it. We'll barricade the place, and make it as safe as we can. We have no valuables, and we can take what will be useful, and leave the rest;" but although Abel spoke bravely, the preparations

for the flitting made him sick at heart. It hurt him, too, that Mary could not keep the gladness from her face, when he told her that they must leave.

"Oh, Abel, is it wrong that I'm so thankful to go?" she said, clinging to him. "I did not mind much until baby came. Since then, I've lived in terror."

"Poor little woman! I wonder if life must always be a failure for me! I thought my luck had come when I got my uncle's letter."

"Failure! it can't be whilst you have me and baby, and I do not fear but that in His own good time God will let us have a peaceful home of our own."

The following afternoon, the flitting began. The dray, drawn up before the door, was packed with bed and bedding, walls of comfort for Mary and her baby, and Margaret. A few simple utensils absolutely necessary for housekeeping, and the personal luggage of the household, completed the load. Abel glanced back at the barricaded house, and closed the door with a snap. The sooner they were away the better. He gave the signal to start, and the patient bullocks strained at their yokes to get the heavy load under way, Abel and one of the men walking on one side, whilst David and the other farm hand urged on the team. A pet lamb followed, bleating piteously, and David called a halt whilst he hoisted it into the dray.

"Look after her, Margaret. We can't leave her to starve in the bush."

A few yards further on, a cat rubbed against his legs, purring whilst she mewed. This flitting was a bad business, David thought, as he stooped and swung her on to his shoulder.

"Pussy," he whispered, stroking her the while. "You can't come with us. You've just got to make your own living in the bush, and turn into a little wild cat instead of a tame one. We can't help it, pussy, we'd take you if we could," and very gently he disentangled the clinging claws, and put her on the ground. For a little while pussy followed the dray, but presently, lingering behind, was lost sight of in the bush.

The track led straight past Jacob Godwin's homestead, and here, too, they found busy preparations for departure.

"Yes, we're going," said Uncle Jacob, "although for my part I call it humbug. I'd stay here if I had my way, and if a nigger dared to show his face, I'd take a shot at him from the window, but Pussy, here"—with a nod at Margaret—"knows well enough that if wife thinks one way and I another, I bluster a bit and give in. They say, too, we'll all be wanted to shoulder a gun and march against the rascals, and for my part I'll be glad to do it. It's time we taught 'em their place. Where are we goin' to, do you say? Blessed if I know! but we'll try and find some place together, I should say."

So Uncle Jacob chattered on to hide his intense discomfiture at having to abandon his snug home for an indefinite period, for laugh the Maoris to scorn as he might, he was too old a settler not to be aware of the seriousness of the present outlook.

It was quite a cavalcade that finally turned into the high road to New Plymouth, for the older Godwins had more household gods to carry with them than the young couple so lately come from England.

The road into the town was alive with traffic; settlers who, like the Godwins, were removing to New Plymouth for safety; Taranaki volunteers, who with martial show came marching out to meet them and conduct them into the town; Maoris, mixed groups of men, women, and children, who almost lined the road, and did not attempt to conceal their glee at the discomfiture of the Pakeha. One hideous old crone who sat by the roadside with an orange handkerchief bound round her head, and her elfish black locks hanging straight on each side of her face, looked up with a leer at Mary and her baby.

"Ah!" she cried, in English, throwing out her hands; "you are leaving the pretty nests which we'll soon set a-crackling with firebrands;" and her laughter followed the dray as it went creaking on its way.

Mary's face grew white as she clasped her baby tighter.

"Oh, I'm so thankful, so thankful we are out of it, baby and I," she said, shuddering a little.

"Don't take it so to heart, dear," Margaret answered reassuringly. "That was just a cross wicked old woman, nothing more. A copper would have turned her curses into blessings."

Upon reaching new Plymouth, they found Folkes on the look out for them.

"You've done well to come at once; by to-morrow it might have been almost impossible to secure you a lodging, for martial law will be proclaimed, and the English for miles round will be flocking into the town. As it is, by a wonderful stroke of luck I've secured a house, which you can occupy between you. The family it belongs to is off to England, and I got it on easy terms. It's just on the borders of the town, and fairly roomy."

Mary listened with untold gratitude, but Margaret's eyes rested on Folkes's arm, which hung in a sling.

"How is it? How are you?" she whispered in his ear.

He smiled up at the anxious questioner. "Disabled with that hand for a while, but finding out what a lot a fellow can do with one hand," he said cheerfully. "Now follow me, all of you, and I will take you home."

He used the word "home" advisedly, for the pathos of Mary's face was not lost upon him. It

was a small place for two families to occupy, but Mary found herself in possession of one fair sized room, which Abel and David between them soon reduced to something like order. Then Abel declared his intention of going off to enrol himself as a member of the volunteers. Again Mary looked up in quick distress. It was a new and fearful suggestion that safety for herself and baby might be bought at the expense of danger to the man who was dearer than life itself.

"I did not think that you would have to fight, Abel," she faltered.

"Did not you, little wife?" Abel answered, assuming a playfulness he was very far from feeling. "Did you think I should stop at home and mind the baby?"

He closed the door and left her, and Mary could not see the logs that sputtered in the large open fireplace but through a red mist of tears. David, who knelt on the floor unpacking a parcel, turned uneasily as the sound of a sob that would not be repressed fell on his ear. A sudden flash of memory brought back to him the only other time that he could remember his sister's utterly breaking down, the day on which Abel had decided so impulsively to go to New Zealand. He rose and stood by her.

"Don't cry, Polly," he said, relapsing into the name he had called her by at home. "It's not a bit likely that Abel will be killed, you know. They are sure to send other fellows who

know more about it to the front first, at any rate."

Mary gave a watery smile at the odd form of comfort.

"It's not quite that, Davie, it's everything together. It's hearing of those other people going back to dear, sweet England where, even if you have only a cottage to live in, you are in peace and safety, with no black faces grinning at you and cursing you as that poor woman cursed me as I came along. And there's Uncle Peter lying there like a log, with never a woman to care for him. Oh, David, I'm such a coward to-night. I've never said a single word since I came out about the longing for home, but it's mastering me, it won't be kept quiet; it cries and cries in my heart until I feel as if every one I looked at must know how home-sick I am. It's such a comfort just to speak to you, for you don't seem a boy any longer. You've got a thoughtful look like a man, and you are such a comfort to me. I can talk to you and trust you not to tell poor Abel what a coward he has for a wife."

David listened in silent astonishment; the position between him and his sister seemed suddenly reversed; she had always thought for him, and now he must look after her; his own self-pity, when first he heard that he must go to the colony, had almost choked his sympathy for Mary; now he would have gladly sacrificed every

possession to give her her heart's desire and send her back to England. And the ambitions which had seemed so great to him at home, where had they gone to? Life out here was so full of adventure, of new sights, new interests, that he was not sure, that given the chance of returning at once to England and his studies, he would avail himself of it. He would rather stay here and see this strange struggle of race fought out, as men like Folkes and the Bishop would have it fought. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord."

But while these thoughts went surging through his brain he stood stammering words of comfort to his sister.

"I'm sorry you feel like that, Polly. I didn't just know, you see. You are so good, I felt whatever Abel liked you'd like too. I hated it just at first, but then there came Folkes. There's not another man like him anywhere, and Ruby. Well, I should not like to think that I shouldn't see Ruby again, and I'm used to the Maoris and like them, just as Folkes and Margaret do. I think George is better than any English boy I've known, and"—David's voice grew lower—"he's not ashamed of it."

Mary had risen, laid the baby on the bed, and stirred the logs into a blaze, preparatory to getting a meal ready.

"Yes, yes, David, of course that's the sensible way to look at things."

"But if you feel bad at any time you can talk it out," said David, "I shan't split."

Then he took up his cap and went out.

There was storm in the air, storm in the cloud which enveloped Mount Egmont from head to foot, storm in the beautiful but angry sunset which clothed the Sugar Loaves in lurid light, suggestion of storm also in the *Niger*, the English corvette which lay anchored off the shore, mutterings of thunder in the proclamation posted all over the town in English and Maori, so that all that passed might read, declaring the whole province of Taranaki to be placed, by order of the Governor, under martial law.

The storm broke that night in wild wind and deluging rain, in lightning and in thunder, and David, as he lay on his fern bed in the shed which served him for a shelter, wondered if his hardihood would hold out when the thunder would be that of cannon and the lightning the flash of guns.

"I've Mary and the baby to look after anyway," he thought, remembering his sisters tears.

The next few days were full of excitement. More and more settlers flocked into the town until every dwelling-place, warehouses, and even some of the chapels, were made use of; then the Governor arrived from Auckland with two hundred soldiers under command of Colonel Gold—the sight of the redcoats greatly reassuring

the citizens as they marched gaily into the town to the cheering sound of a band. Meanwhile it was said that on the disputed land Wi-Kingi, in utter insolence, had caused a *pa* to be built up; and from the surrounding country came rumours of homesteads destroyed by fire, cattle raided, and white men murdered. Even Uncle Jacob grew sombre, and wandered about with his hands in his pockets breathing vengeance against the niggers.

"But once let the redcoats and bluejackets get at 'em, and there'll be an end of it," he prophesied; but there was not an end.

The redcoats marched out in full force against a strongly fortified *pa*, to find their fire smartly returned, and when, after a night of siege, they succeeded in effecting an entrance, they found to their great annoyance that the *pa* was abandoned, that the wily Maoris had escaped, nor did they succeed in making a single capture. But on their somewhat mortified march back to New Plymouth one of the soldiers detected a slight movement in the bush, and dashing in dragged out a tall lad, a Maori, who, either from fright or some other cause, seemed wholly unable to give any account of himself.

"A spy I expect," said the lieutenant who commanded the division. "Bring him along; we may be able to get something out of him about the movements of the enemy when we can make him speak."

"He's shamming ill," said the man who had captured him, "can't get him along nohow, sir."

The lieutenant gave George—for it was he—one searching glance.

"He's not shamming," said he, "starving more likely. Give him food and help him along. He still may be useful to us."

George refused food with a quick shake of the head. He was past swallowing, almost past feeling, as he stumbled along between two soldiers told off to help him. They were not unkind, but talked to him in rough, sturdy English, bidding him "keep his pecker up," "never say die," and other cheering admonitions, which were all so much Greek to the utterly exhausted boy. Half the inhabitants of New Plymouth turned out to see the regiment march in, amongst them Folkes, whose eagle eye quickly discovered poor George dragged along between the soldiers.

"George, George," he shouted, taking a forward step; and at his voice George's head turned, the great eyes filled with tears. He tried to loosen the soldiers' hold upon him, but the effort was too much for him, and he fell fainting to the ground.

One word of explanation to the lieutenant in command, secured Folkes's right to befriend George; the soldiers marched on to their quarters and the crowd followed. It was only one or two of the more compassionate who lingered behind to give Folkes a helping hand with his charge,

amongst them David. Quickly they extemporised a kind of litter, and, borne between four, carried the boy towards the house where the Godwins had taken up their abode.

"We can make up a bed for him in the verandah, he'll like best to lie in the open air," Folkes said.

Mary was quickly on the spot with tender ministrations. She knelt by him feeding him with spoonfuls of warm milk as he could be persuaded to take it, she bathed his poor torn hands and feet, and his grateful eyes followed hers like a faithful dog.

"Die here!" he said at last, with a contented sigh.

"Bosh!" said David, breaking into slang. "You're a lot better already. You'll be on your legs to-morrow."

But the morrow came, and many morrows after it, and the Godwins saw that for George there was no getting better; he was sinking painlessly to sleep, quite content, quite happy, always uncomplaining; winning the affection of every member of the united households.

Even Uncle Jacob paused in his coming in and going out to ask how the boy fared, and would apologize for the interest he felt in him by explaining that they all owed the lad a good turn because he helped Folkes to escape.

"Saved my life, in fact," Folkes would answer with a smile.

Every night Folkes came and lay on a mattress in the verandah to keep watch over George. He had given up his own house to women and children, and asserted that he might as well sleep there as anywhere. David and he became responsible for the family, for Abel was ordered off for service and was constantly away at night, and Uncle Jacob was busy helping to fortify Marsland Hill in the centre of the town, where, if the war went on, it was proposed that the wives and children of the settlers should be gathered in every night for safety. It was from words dropped here and there during those long night watches, that Folkes gleaned what had happened to George since they had parted near Poimena. He had started off northward in the hope that after many days walking through almost impassable forests, and the fording of many rivers, he might reach Auckland, and take up his abode again with the Bishop; but a very few days made him see that the plan was an impossible one to carry out. A friendly Maori, who gave him food, told him that Wi-Kingi, suspecting that he had helped Folkes to escape, had set a price upon his head and issued strict orders that the first Maori that found him should tomahawk him and bring his scalp to Wi-Kingi. From the north, other tribes were trooping silently towards Taranaki to assist their brethren in the coming struggle with the white man, and George dare not follow any of the usual trails for fear of being caught, so for a

fortnight or more he had led the life of a hunted animal in the bush, feeding only on such roots as it was possible to eat. Swift upon his enfeebled frame followed consumption, that cruel enemy of the coloured races, developing with awful rapidity the seed of disease which must have hitherto lain latent in his constitution. At last, in sheer despair, George made his way back to New Plymouth; he could trust the white men to let him die in peace, he said, a Christian's death. To be put to death by any savage heathen method, seemed to him a punishment and shame he could not face.

"God so loved, so loved poor George," he kept repeating. "He brought him to the white man."

It was only by his random talk, as he lay between dozing and waking, that Folkes and David gathered how he fretted for another sight of the Chem father.

"I suppose I could not get a boat to Auckland and fetch him?" David said one day, turning to Folkes with quivering lips.

"Oh no," Folkes answered sadly; "he'll have passed away long before the Bishop could get here; nor could you get away, supposing it was right to spend the money. There is scarcely any communication between Auckland and New Plymouth, now that times are so unsettled, and it's more than could be demanded of any overworked man that he should travel hundreds of miles to comfort a dying boy."

David's mind grasped the reasonableness of Folkes's words, but his heart rebelled. The dying boy was giving his life for another, and with tears in his eyes, he wandered off into the town to gather the latest news. It was very threatening. On the Devon Road, close at hand, a large *pa* was being built, and strongly fortified. It was quite probable that the Maoris would make a raid upon the town, and all men's faces were grave, and women's white with fear of what was coming; but the troops were to be reinforced, and a steamship from Auckland was already on its way. Once more David went off to the Sugar Loaves to watch it come in. He did not attempt to climb the one he and Folkes had scaled more than a year ago. It was not safe to go far from the town alone. So in company with several others, he stood on the shore greeting the ship's arrival with a hearty cheer, and watching the soldiers disembark. Boat after boatload were safely landed and marched off towards New Plymouth, and the last passenger to land was the Bishop. David dashed forward, seized him by the hand, pouring out incoherent welcome. To him the Bishop's arrival at that particular time seemed like a modern miracle.

The Bishop's strong face softened as he heard the story.

"Poor lad, poor George, my godson in the faith; he's making a worthy end," he said, his voice trembling a little. "My journey is not all

in vain if I comfort his dying bed. I came by request of the Governor to interview a wavering chief, who is uncertain whether to fight for or against us. At any rate I may persuade him to be neutral, for he's a friend of mine. I'll drop my bag, and come straight away with you."

"Are you going to be here long?" David asked.

"No, boy, no; there is work pressing to be done at home, where as yet war does not trouble us. Pray God we may keep out of it. A good many of the natives are already trending down to Taranaki, which will be the chief centre of the fighting. I return with this steamer in two or three days at the latest."

How fast David's heart beat as he led the Bishop right through the town to the house high on the hill which was their temporary home. While still afar off, Folkes, who was sitting by George, saw the boy's eyelids flutter, and a curiously expectant look cross his features, followed by a brilliant smile.

"Chem father comes this way," he said slowly.

"I'm afraid not, George," Folkes answered, thinking he wandered, but glancing down the grassy slope he saw two figures toiling upwards, David and the Bishop, and in a few minutes more the Bishop was kneeling on the rough floor of the verandah with George's head cradled on his breast.

"God so loved—so loved poor George he

brought Chem father," George gasped. "Now George will go home happy."

The Bishop looked up with a smile; outside God's sunshine flooded both sea and mountain, casting rainbow colouring on the soft evening mist that crept up the sides of the Sugar Loaves, and here in the verandah that commanded so glorious a view a Maori boy lay dying, with the sunshine of God's love flooding his whole soul and being. There was not room for a single regret. Rather was he thanking God for this fresh testimony to the Faith which could make the whole world kin.

Folkes shared his watch that night with the Bishop and David, for the three knew that the end was not far off. The silence of that watch was broken now and then by the Bishop's quiet voice repeating prayer or Psalm or well-known hymn, words that if the dying brain might not fully understand brought comfort to the boy, as the peaceful face testified, and just as the morning broke with pearly softness over sea and land George's eyes opened for the last time, resting on the Bishop's face.

"Home," he whispered; "George is close at home."

The next moment he was *there*, and the Bishop, bending down, closed his eyes, plucked one of the arums that clustered round the verandah, and laid it between the hands, which he folded on George's breast.

"May our last end be like his," he said.

That day George was laid to rest in the churchyard of St. Mary on the hill. The Bishop read the service, and Folkes, David, and the Godwins, uncle and nephew, who happened to be at home at the time, carried the body in a sheet and lowered it into the grave, where flowers hid the peaceful face from sight.

Jacob Godwin turned away, rubbing his eyes with his knuckles.

"The only nigger I ever have loved," he said; "I'd have been glad to own him for a son."

George's death had broken down the last barrier of prejudice, and Jacob Godwin was kinder to Maoris all his life for the sake of the one for whom he mourned that day.

CHAPTER XIII

DAVID'S CHOICE

NEARLY a year had passed since George had been laid to rest by the Bishop in the churchyard on the hill, a year of constant trouble and unrest for all in Taranaki, for the war had lingered on, with constant skirmishes and fighting with the Maoris, who had proved brave enemies. For the time being the victory was with the English, and a truce declared. Wi-Kingi, whose personal bravery did not equal his boasting, had left his followers to fight under other leaders, and had retired to Waikato, where it was said that he was ready for overtures of peace; but colonists competent to judge pronounced that the peace would be of short duration, and that this sort of guerilla warfare might extend over many years, a prophecy which became literally true, for it was not until ten years later that peace throughout the northern island of New Zealand was fully restored. At the same time, the temporary cessation from hostilities in February, 1861, was

gratefully hailed by all. Some of the settlers even talked of returning to their farms, for the overcrowding in New Plymouth had produced much illness, and many of the women and children had been shipped off to Nelson. It was only by Mary's urgent entreaty that she had been allowed to stay. The tie of sisters could hardly have been stronger than the great affection that had developed between her and Margaret Godwin, to whose stronger character the weaker woman had clung with passionate intensity. Night after night the beating of drums had summoned the Godwin women to refuge on Marsland Hill, where they and baby had camped as best they could; by day they had crept back home, seldom talking of the terror that was ever with them, that husband or brother might lay down his life in some desperate fray with the Maoris. But now the truce was declared, and with thankful hearts the Godwins told their tale of men complete, though Dick had a nasty gash across the cheek, and Tom limped upon a leg that had been shot through and was long in healing.

Now a family council was called in the verandah. Should they risk a little and go back to their several homes? Jacob Godwin said Yes, but his elder boys said No.

"We should just get settled in and then this war would burst out afresh, and all our labour would be wasted," they declared.

"And what do you say, little woman? Shall

we have another try at Poimena?" Abel whispered, pinching Mary's ear.

There was something almost joyous in his manner, which Mary could not account for nor understand. Their future looked dark indeed, whether they stayed in New Plymouth or went back to their farm.

"Oh, Abel, we must stay here. Look at Joy!" and Abel did look at the little figure that tottered up and down the verandah very tenderly.

"There's just one other alternative," he said. "We can go home."

Every head was lifted, and Mary, unable to speak for a moment, put her hand in her husband's.

"Is it a joke?" she asked, tremulously.

"No, dear; it's not a joke. Uncle Peter is dead, and the farm and everything he has is left to me, and here is the lawyer's letter which tells the news. It has been delayed for over a month."

"But—but it *can't* be true. Uncle Peter disinherited you."

"He said he meant to do it, but apparently the will was not destroyed. I expect he was waiting to find a proper heir."

David breathed a little heavily, thankful beyond all words that the secret of Uncle Peter's offer to himself need never be divulged. It would dash his sister's present joy, which was almost beyond description. She hung round

Abel's neck, laughing and crying by turns, then she caught Joy in her arms, cooing over her and telling her of the joys that awaited her at home, and finally she turned to David, catching his hands and smiling through her tears.

"I believe the joy will drive me crazy," she said, "but it will be good for you too, Davie, money for all you want; for college first, and then you can choose your calling. Oh, isn't it too beautiful to be going home?" And then, her rapture cooling, she remarked the silence of her audience, and her heart smote her for ingratitude. "I'm sorry," she said, and came to an awkward pause.

"It's said a little late, my dear. You seem mighty glad to be leaving us all," said Uncle Jacob.

"Oh!" Mary cried, moved to repentance, "it's not that I don't know how good and kind you've been, but it's just that I'm English to the backbone. Have you never felt the longing for the sight of an English lane or for the sound of an English church bell?"

"No," said Uncle Jacob, not unkindly. "New Zealand's the land for me; there's room enough and to spare; you see men as they are, simple and sincere; they'll give you of their best and ask for nothing back. I brought my wife out with me, and a good one she's been, and a good mother too, no better in the colony, and I want nothing more. As for Peter's money, I'm glad enough

you've got it. I could never touch a penny of it. It was his unkindness that drove me from the land, but he did me a good turn there, all unknownst to him, as you may say. I forgive him now he's gone; it's the last word I'll say against him. But you're welcome to the land and to the money."

There was truth in both views of the question, and Abel soothed the troubled waters by thanking Uncle Jacob for all his goodness to him, and promising to make good the loan of money immediately upon his return.

"Tut! tut!" said Uncle Jacob, testily. "There's nothing to return but a few bullocks and bits of things, and it's not your fault the venture turned out a failure. I'll not deny but it's a disappointment that you're leaving, but as Mary here says, it may be better for the child, but I would like one of you to have stuck by the new country."

"I will," said David, quietly. "I was just as much against coming out as Mary, but I feel as if my life lay here now and not in England."

Uncle Jacob brought down his hand upon the boy's shoulder with a resounding slap that made David wince as he laughed.

"There speaks the lad for me! And you may make your home with me, boy, and I'll see you get your start."

"Thank you," David said, reddening a little,

"my home is settled. Mr. Kempe wants me to go to him if ever I leave Mary."

"He may have said that, dear boy, in an impulse of gratitude, but I think the offer should be renewed in writing," said Mary, gently.

"It was renewed; he wrote a year ago when Folkes went back with the Bishop, and told me he was settled on land near Auckland, and that he'd be glad for me to join him, for Ruby never ceased talking about me."

"Why did not you tell us at the time?"

"What was the good of talking of it? I could not have gone then. There was all the trouble here. I could not have left you to it."

"Well, well, I've been a prosperous man till now; I've no right to complain now that things go crooked, but it's late in life to be turned out of home, nor know when I'll get back there, and the relations I coaxed out are only anxious to get back again, and the boy I would have kept finds newer friends to go to, and Margaret here is always in a flutter because, forsooth, she can't get a daily letter from her lover."

"But I have one now, father, and he's coming," Margaret said, slipping an arm round the old man's neck.

"What the mischief is he coming for? Not to carry you back with him, Pussy?"

"That's what he says, father. He's come into money; quite enough for us to live on; and oh! he's so tired of waiting."

"That's the way with young folks nowadays. When I was Folkes's age——"

"You asked me to marry you one month and the wedding was two months after," put in his wife, a little archly. "It's a heartbreak to let her go, but she's been a good daughter, Jacob."

"Ah, you sly Pussy!" said Jacob, stroking the golden head; "you've been talking over mother first, and what mother says I've got to put up with. I could have wished you a settler's wife. You're lost upon a parson. I thought Folkes had more sense than to take such a notion in his head all in a minute like that, and go off for training with the Bishop before one had time to say Jack Robinson."

"But it wasn't sudden; he'd been thinking of it for years, and could not make up his mind, and then, as he sat by George as he lay dying, it came upon him that to try and turn men from darkness into light must be the noblest work in all the world, so he offered himself to the Bishop."

"That's too fine talk for me, Pussy; but I expect each man must choose for himself what he's going to do in the world, and every woman will choose her own mate. I've no fault to find with Folkes except his calling. You'll be wanting a smart frock for the wedding," he ended, by way of turning the subject.

"Oh no," laughed Margaret; "my Sunday frock and bonnet will do quite well."

"Well, frock or no frock," said Jacob, waxing

violent to hide emotion, "you'll not leave me without a good round sum of money in your pocket. You'll find it useful at the other end;" and blowing his nose vigorously on a huge handkerchief, he sauntered off to the town.

The next week or two were full of preparation. Mary's hands were busy with sewing needful for her husband and baby on the voyage home, whilst Mrs. Godwin and Margaret stitched the garments that made up Margaret's simple trousseau. It was arranged that Folkes should arrive about the third week in February, and that the wedding should be at St. Mary's, where all the family had been christened in their childhood, and that bride and bridegroom, Abel and Mary, and David should all leave for Auckland by the first ship going north, and from there Folkes had already bespoken berths for the Godwins in the first vessel bound for England.

It was David who, on the eve of the wedding, stood waiting once more on the shore for the boat to bring off Folkes from the ship that had just arrived from Auckland, and he wondered, as he stood there, if the change of purpose in Folkes's life would have made any difference in his outer man—whether he would be graver, more sedate, and less easy to talk to; but the "Hullo, David!" and the cheery grip of the hand with which his friend greeted him completely reassured him.

"It's jolly to get you back. I've missed you ever so."

Then he poured out the story of the year's adventures, and how Mary and Abel were going home and he was to stay behind.

"And this is the boy who, two years ago, thought that life lived out of England was just life wasted," Folkes said good-humouredly.

"Yes, but I'm older now, and know more what I want."

"You'll settle among a colony of friends. You start with Mr. Kempe, and Margaret and I shall be somewhere near; and then there's the Bishop."

Then Folkes's quick eye caught the flutter of a skirt, and heard a sound of happy laughter, as Margaret came running down the hill to meet him; and David, turning on his heel, remembered an urgent message in New Plymouth, so that the lovers met alone.

Nothing could exceed the simplicity of the next day's ceremony. There were no invited guests, no bridesmaids, no best man, not even a wedding breakfast; but at the given hour Margaret walked up the church upon her father's arm, her sweet face framed in a bonnet with broad strings tied under her chin. By the chancel step Folkes waited to claim her, and Margaret looked up into his face with a trusting smile. Not a single misgiving clouded her happy mind as she put her hand in his, for surely there is no such blissful moment in a woman's life as when she knows her lot cast in for ever with that of

the man whom she loves and honours more than all the world.

The leave-taking followed hard upon the wedding, for the whole party adjourned quietly to the ship, on the point of departure for Auckland The luggage had been taken down previously, so that nothing remained but the farewell on the beach, when, wrapped in her mother's arms Margaret's calm forsook her for one moment.

"I hope I'll be half as good a wife as you've been, mother darling."

"A thing past praying for," answered her father, bent on bearing up, and wearing a smile, though tears were in his eyes. "Now then, the boat is waiting. Good-bye all. Mary, you little traitor; I'll give you a kiss, though I swear you don't deserve it, for carrying Abel off to England. But it's the same tale all the world over; the wives get their own way. David lad, it's not good-bye at all. Please God we'll meet again. Abel, give us your hand; I'm sorry to lose you, but there's no ill-will! God speed you, Folkes, parson though you'll be! Pussy—Pussy my dear——"

There was no farewell to his daughter, only that Margaret was held for a full minute in the father's arms. Then he put her from him almost roughly.

"Come along, wife," he said, putting her arm through his—"come away! It'll break my heart if I watch the boat carry Pussy off."

So the last sight Margaret had of father and mother was of a couple arm-in-arm, with their backs turned towards the sea, walking with stumbling steps away to New Plymouth. It was her brothers that gave the parting cheer.

Three days later David had another leave-taking to make, when he went on board the ship at Auckland that was to carry his sister and brother back to England. He had not realized till then how much the parting would cost him. There had been only one night to spend at Auckland, just sufficient time in which to see Margaret's future home. Mr. Kempe's place was five miles off, and David was to go to him directly his relations had started. At five o'clock that afternoon Mr. Kempe had promised to drive in and fetch him.

"I should like to have seen the place that will be your home, Davie," said Mary. "I had hoped once that your home would have been always with me until you married."

"I thought so too, Polly; and of course it would if you hadn't had Abel to look after you."

Mary smiled a little; she too was learning how their relative positions had become reversed.

"I'm not afraid to leave you; I'm sure you will be good."

"I'll have a try," said David, simply.

"And to-day's Sunday, the 25th of February.

You'll go to church directly you're ashore, and pray that God will give us a safe voyage."

"Yes; and Mary, I want you to know that you've always been a brick. Don't cry if you can help it. It makes me feel a brute;" and before he quite broke down, David slipped off in the boat that was to take him back to shore.

One last wave of the hand, one final shouted good-bye, and David knew his choice was made: life in the colony rather than in England. His exact vocation was at present all uncertain.

There was an unusual amount of stir in the streets of Auckland. David saw the Bishop striding along with a preoccupied air in the direction of St. Paul's, two other Bishops with him. What could it mean? he wondered. Mindful of his promise to go to church and pray for the homeward bound, he followed with the rest, making bold to ask if anything particular were happening that Sunday.

"The consecration of Bishop Patteson. He is going to undertake the sole charge of the Melanesian Mission," said the lady he had spoken to. "If you care to come with me, I dare say I can find you a seat. The church will be very full."

"Thank you," said David, "I should like to come."

There was nothing remarkable in the church they entered; no particular charm of architecture nor sumptuousness of appointment, but in the

kneeling congregation there seemed to move the spirit of grace and supplication. Who cannot look back on some special service which leaves an individual mark upon the life? Such was this day to David. On the chancel step knelt Patteson, a meek and holy calm upon his face. Within the rails stood Bishop Selwyn and his two brother Bishops from Wellington and Nelson, and other clergy, amongst them a Maori deacon, all waiting to lay hands of benediction on the head of one prepared to give himself up body, soul, and spirit to the Master's work; and the field that he had chosen, and for which he seemed so specially fitted, was the Melanesian Islands, amongst which he had been cruising for the past several years, peopled by men of different race and language; a work of love, albeit a work which should earn for him a martyr's crown. Had he seen that crown shining before his eyes, it would not have destroyed the calm upon his face. He knew each time the Mission schooner sailed away that he carried his life in his hands, and he was ready at any time to lay it down. It was the steadfast purpose of the look that set David's pulses beating. Here was a man not afraid to do and dare for Christ his King, and David's head sank between his hands.

"O God, make me like him, and make me *brave* like him, ready to do what Thou would'st have me do," was the prayer he whispered.

When he looked up again, a bright-eyed

Melanesian boy, clad in a neat grey blouse and loose white trousers, was holding the book from which the Bishop read the solemn words of consecration whilst every hand rested on Patteson's head, the black hand of the Maori deacon linked with the others. Christ's touch made all men kin.

David left the church in a sort of dream; there was a struggle to be fought out in his heart alone, and he wandered off to the seashore to sit down and think. Could there be any work in the world half as noble as this, the going out to men who had never had the chance of hearing of the Saviour who had lived and died for them. Was he fit for it? Could he by years of trying be trained for service such as this? He thought of George, his lovely life and end, and there was the memory of Tagalana, the Melanesian boy, present in church to-day, and the Maori clergyman within the altar rails, sure testimony that dark races were willing to learn if only white men were willing to go and teach them. How long he sat there David never knew; most certainly it was the crisis of his life, the moment when God's voice sounded as truly in his ears as in Isaiah's in that wonderful vision in the temple; and David's answer was the same, "Here am I, dear Lord; send me."

That afternoon, before he returned to Folkes's house, where it was arranged that Mr. Kempe should meet him, David went to see the Bishop.

"What is it, David?" he asked kindly. "I have not many minutes to give you to-day."

"No, sir," said David; "but I want—I wish—if you think I ever could be fit for it—to be a missionary."

"That's a great wish for a great work, David. When did it come?"

"I think it's been there for quite a long time, ever since Folkes left, but it never spoke loud until to-day in church."

"At Bishop Patteson's consecration?"

"Yes, sir. I've come to live near Auckland; I'd study hard; I'd do anything you told me, if only you don't think it overbold in me to think of it."

"If this is indeed God's call, I would not be the one to hinder you," said the Bishop, gravely, "rather would I give God thanks; but you are too young to come to any definite decision. If this is indeed your vocation, the Voice will speak again, as it did to Samuel. Meanwhile, keep your heart and ears open and listen. To begin your preparation will be also good, and to-morrow, if you can come, I will sketch out a definite course of study for you, which you shall carry out under me. Shall we pray about it?"

And side by side the Bishop and David knelt, whilst the Bishop asked for that right judgment in all things, that God's good Spirit alone can give, words few and simple, which David never forgot. Then he shook hands with him, and sent him away.

Of that interview David made no mention

when he went back to Folkes and Margaret. They noticed that he was deeply stirred, but, putting it down to the parting with his sister, made no mention of it. Later on he told them that he had been present at Bishop Patteson's consecration.

"Oh, were you there?" cried Margaret. "We never saw you. It stirred me very much, for next year my husband will be ordained."

Already her little world centred in her husband. Then the sound of wheels outside diverted their thoughts, and all ran out to welcome Mr. Kempe and Ruby, who, with one spring, was in David's arms.

"David, David!" she cried, "daddy says you are coming home with us, and are never going to leave us any more."

The welcome was very sweet. Warm and kindly, too, was Mr. Kempe's greeting.

"No, I'll not put up to-day," he said, in answer to Folkes's offer to take the horse out. "I've only just come in to fetch this boy, who has decided to cast in his lot with me and Ruby."

The day had been one of such conflicting emotion that David was quite glad to find himself sitting by Mr. Kempe's side in the cart, with Ruby on his knee, and started on his way home. There was much to hear and tell upon that homeward drive. Sally was with them still. "Spoils little missy here," said Mr. Kempe, smiling at Ruby.

"And Jim Cornish. What of him?" David inquired.

"Oh, he's stayed behind, sole master of the farm. He thought me quite benighted for deserting him, but my lame leg hindered me, and there was Ruby, you see. I could not let her grow up a little dunce. We've a pretty place now, but it cannot compare with the picturesqueness of the one I left behind me—just enough land to keep me busy, and three times a week I bring in missy for her lessons. There's a nice lady here who teaches children, and sometimes we bring one of Ruby's companions out to stay with us. Oh, we are quite in the gay world, I assure you, but I think I've left my heart behind in that lodge in the wilderness. I've lived too long away from my fellows to care about society, but I'm heartily glad to have you with me, David, the son of my old age."

Arrived at their journey's end, Ruby took David by the hand and trotted him all over the place. He was given a personal introduction to every animal, and the last was a pony that he might consider his very own.

"Daddy gave it me that I might give it you," said Ruby, lifting up her face to be kissed.

Beautiful Sally, too, smiled upon him, murmuring pretty Maori welcome. It was when Ruby had gone off to bed, and David once again sat with Mr. Kempe in the verandah whilst he

smoked, that Mr. Kempe first made mention of the boy's future.

"Of course, if you choose to stay with me and work upon the land, that would please me," he said; "but I want you to feel free to choose another calling if you like it better. You see here, close to the seat of Government, there may be an opening for a boy like you. I don't fancy a settler's life is exactly your vocation. You're a studious kind of chap, fond of your books, aren't you? Just speak your mind, for this is to be your home, and you shall have your chance."

It was a full minute before David answered, when he did his voice was rather husky.

"Thank you, you're very good. I think my choice is made. I want to be trained for a missionary, and if I'm given my choice, I should like to work amongst the Maoris. I spoke to the Bishop to-day about it."

It was a blow; it must be confessed that it was a blow to Mr. Kempe.

"Well, if that's your fancy you must have it, I suppose," he said. "But I must say I wish you had chosen something else."

"Why?" David asked.

"Well, perhaps it's truer to say that I've never considered the thing, that missions don't appeal to me; but if they do to you, there's nothing more to be said. It won't make a shadow of difference between you and me, boy."

And so, without further ado, David's choice of

vocation was made and sealed, and month after month as the Bishop watched the development of mind and body, he became fully convinced that David's choice was a wise and right one, that to him Christ's call had come as to the disciples of old—

"Rise up and follow Me."

"Yes, he's made of the sort of stuff that will wear well as a missionary," the Bishop said.

EPILOGUE

TEN years later Mary Godwin stood at the doorway of the Holt, shading her eyes from the bright spring sunshine, looking down the road which led to Plymouth. She took up her position there almost every afternoon about this time, watching for her children's return from school. Through a vista of trees she could catch a glimpse of the harbour where to-day a brown sail glinted in the sunshine, a sight which drew from Mary a sigh of deep content, accentuating the thought that her own barque of life had come to anchor in such pleasant waters. No woman could wish for a prettier home or a better husband. Indeed, Abel seemed made for his present position of yeoman farmer, the possessor of a goodly heritage, with sons growing up to carry on the name of Godwin into future generations. Yes, Mary Godwin was a happy woman, and she had grace to know it.

"Now what can have happened to those blessed children," said a voice behind her, sharp

with anxiety, the spokeswoman Esther, now an old woman, Uncle Peter's servant whom Mary and Abel had accepted with the farm. She kept a general eye on all and regarded the children as her own.

"Why should anything have happened?" Mary answered, smiling.

"Ah! it's well enough to smile, but I never have an easy moment until they are safe home again. I never *did* hold with their drivin' theirselves alone into school at Plymouth in that tee-totum of a cart. There's Miss Joy just turned eleven, no age to have the care of her two brothers."

"But the master was very careful to choose a pony as steady as you are, Esther, with years over its head," Mary answered.

"Well, if harm come of it, you won't say it's for want of warning," Esther grumbled.

"Oh no, you've been excellent at warning, but this afternoon it is not needed, for I hear the rattle of wheels along the lane, and there is Joy's red cloak showing above the hedge;" and Mary went down the flagged pathway, edged now with flower borders, to the gate to await her children.

"You're late, my darlings, and mammy gets a sad scolding from old Esther every time you dawdle on the road."

Joy sprang to the ground, waving a letter over her head.

"Here, Jack and Tom, just take the pony

round whilst I settle mammy," she cried merrily; whereupon a scuffle ensued between the rosy boys of nine and seven for possession of the reins.

"Each take one," suggested Joy. "Now, mammy, you shall learn the reason of our dawdling, as you choose to call it—nothing less than our waiting at the post-office whilst the mail, which we knew was in, was sorted; and I've brought you Uncle David's letter, which you would not have had otherwise before to-morrow morning; so you'll just have to pay for it in kisses before I let you touch it." And Mary paid the price demanded in full measure.

Joy had grown up thus far true to her name; she was the very sunshine of the house.

"There! now you may have it," said Joy, tossing back her mane of golden hair. "Where's daddy? I must fetch him in to tea."

"In the yard, giving orders to the men; and give the boys a call. Esther is waiting to put on their clean collars."

David's letter was put on the mantelshelf, to read when the children were gone to bed. Tea was already laid in the hall upon the oval oak table, polished to such brightness that the shining tea-service and the dishes of bread-and-butter and cake were reflected in it as in the surface of a mirror. That silver teapot and cream jug had been a sore bone of contention between Esther and her mistress, Esther maintaining that silver for daily use was sinful extravagance.

"In all the years I served the old master we never used it once. It was kept in green baize bags and polished at spring cleaning."

"Which made it neither useful nor ornamental," Mary had answered with gentle decision. "I wish my children to carry away a pretty remembrance of home." So the plate was taken into everyday wear and cleaned by Mary's own fingers.

The spring evening was chilly, and in the open fireplace a log fire crackled cheerily. The dark oak settle by the side of it was cosy with crimson cushions, appropriated at present by a long-haired Persian cat. From outside came the sound of merry voices, and there was a stampede across the hall as the boys rushed through on their way to be tidied up. Half an hour later the whole party—father, mother, and the three children—were gathered round the tea-table, discussing the events of the day—the greatest, the arrival of Uncle David's letter, for Mary took care that the brother she loved so dearly should be a very present person to her children, although he was separated from them by so many thousand miles.

The story of George was a very great favourite with them all, and Joy declared, when she was big enough, she should write it in a book.

"Am I to sit up and hear Uncle David's letter?" she asked coaxingly, when bedtime came that night.

"No, darling; father and I will read it first, and to-morrow you shall hear all that will interest you in it."

"I wish he'd come home; it would be jolly to hear all about the black men," Jack said, as he kissed his mother.

"Nobody can wish that more than mother, but somehow I don't think he will," said Mary, whose crumpled rose-leaf was the longing she often had to see David once again. She took his letter in her hand tenderly now, pausing before she opened it.

"Suppose—just suppose this was to tell us he was coming home," she said, a smile flickering round her mouth.

"No such luck," said Abel. "Read it up, wifie; let's hear what he has to say"

No; in all the many sheets there was never a word of coming home.

It was cast in that best form of foreign letters written for those at home—a diary letter. It spoke first of the ending of the war, dying now more from the exhaustion of the combatants than any other cause—the war which, in David's eyes, seemed to have gained so little and to have lost so much: "not but that Wi-Kingi, the first to take up arms, was a thorough-paced old traitor," he wrote. "I hear that he has retired to Parihaka and thrown in his lot with Te-whiti, the Maori prophet, and the leader of a curious sect that has started a sort of garbled Old Testament

religion, with all that could ennoble or purify weeded out of it."

Then he went on to tell of Mr. Kempe and his unfailing kindness, which had allowed him to pursue his studies year by year, nor ever thrown any hindrance in the way of the vocation with which he had so little sympathy.

"It is partly, I confess, through Ruby's influence, for Ruby's affection for me has never wavered from childhood until now. It was only yesterday that I realized that she had blossomed into a very lovely young woman, when I read the latent admiration in a young man's eyes as he looked at her. I saw that look years ago in Folkes's face, when he was courting Margaret, and wondered greatly what it might mean. Now I hail it as a sign of development, that I interpreted the glance and found out for myself how beautiful Ruby is. Unless I am mistaken, the young man Stanley will become a frequent visitor."

("Oh," said Mary, looking up from the letter, "it's a dreadful disappointment to me that David will not marry Ruby; I always thought he would."

"That's such a thoroughly sentimental view of the subject—the happy ending of a story-book," said Abel, banteringly. "Go on, please; David writes a good letter.")

"And talking of Margaret brings me on to Folkes, of whom I have heard but little, except

that he is working like a horse in a Maori village up country, trying to gather together the flock of Christians dispersed by this diastrous war. Some alas! died fighting against us, many more have lapsed, and some through good report and ill have clung fast to the Cross of Christ and welcomed Folkes with tears, and are helping him to rebuild church and school, which had fallen into decay. My last piece of news is to me of such great importance that I have purposely left it until now, as I can speak of nothing after it. It is nothing less than this: that to-morrow, if God wills, I shall become a full-fledged clergyman, shall enter the calling to which I have steadfastly looked forward for the last ten years; and the Bishop is going to send me away at once to work amongst the Maoris, by my own special request. I feel the greatness of the task; I know myself all unworthy; the sanguine enthusiasm of my boyhood has forsaken me, for I have lived among Maoris, and carefully studied not only their language but their character. I have found out that boys like George are the exception, not the rule, and so I start upon my work prepared for frequent failure and disappointment, prepared also to give myself up to it, body, soul, and spirit, believing with heartfelt conviction that God is with me, will make good my failures, pour grace upon my work, and grant that at some time (whether in my lifetime or when I have passed away, I cannot tell) it shall bear good fruit."

Mary laid down the letter with dimmed eyes.

"David has made a wise choice, after all," she said. "He's married to his work, and oh! how dearly he loves it!"

"Each man to his taste," said Abel, laughing at her enthusiasm. "I confess work of any sort would be a poor exchange for my bright, cheery little wife. Second to her, perhaps, comes the love of the land I till. It must be bred in the bone, Mary; the affection one gets for the land your forefathers have owned before you. Depend upon it, surly old Uncle Peter had the same feeling. For all his barking he could not pass it on to a stranger or one of another name. Well, I'll take my walk round and see that everything is right and tight for the night."

The secret of Abel's success as a farmer lay in his careful personal supervision. It was his custom every evening, winter or summer, to make the circuit of his farm when the day's work was done, noting what had been neglected during the day, and planning the work for the morrow.

Left to herself, Mary, contrary to her busy wont, sat on in the twilight gazing into the glowing embers of the wood fire, for David's letter had stirred her not a little, telling her as it did of the climax of his career, but at the same time putting the death-blow to the hope that she had secretly nursed that before undertaking any definite work he would return to the old country for a holiday. Now he would become so absorbed

in the interest of his work that she might never see him again. The days which were earlier passed in rapid review before her. How well she remembered his bitter disappointment when it was settled that they should emigrate to New Zealand, and now, by his own freewill, his lot was cast there altogether, and she must not let her own selfish longing for a sight of him blind her to the recognition of God's over-ruling Providence which had changed the whole purpose and ambition of David's life.

"He has chosen the highest. I must give him up ungrudgingly for the Master's service," thought Mary, and yet her face was wet with tears.

Old Esther came in all unheeded and bustled round, clearing away the tea-things. Her mistress's unusual silence baffled her, and under pretence of placing another log upon the fire she knelt before it, bringing her head upon a level with Mary's. The sweet mouth smiled, but there were tears on the folded hands.

"If it's bad news the children brought you I suppose I am to know it," she said, with abrupt familiarity bred of long service.

"But it's not bad news at all. I think I may call it good," Mary answered brightly. "Mr. David writes to say that before this letter reaches us he will be an ordained missionary, and off to work amongst the Maoris."

Esther rose stiffly to her feet, the rapid

clicking of her tongue against the roof her mouth giving token of strong disapproval.

"Waste of good flesh and blood, that's what I call it! Just a 'chuckin' away of the life that the good God have given him, and what for, I'd like to know; but to break his heart over a pack of black fellows who'll stab him if they gets the chance, same as they've done Bishop Patteson, who you're always telling the children about."

"Oh, Esther, how can you suggest a thing so awful!" and Mary's face glimmered deathly white in the twilight.

"There now! I hadn't no business to scare the colour from your cheeks. I dare say some on 'em lives to come home; but, if Mr. David's mind was set on being a parson, why couldn't he come home? He'd have found work to do here sure-ly. Whilst there's babies and weddings and buryin's there must be parsons to see to it all, and he could preach sermons too, I'll warrant, and he'd not be going about all the time with his life in his hands, as you may say. The worst he'd have to put up with in the old country might be a bit of bag-bitin' now and again. All that's wrong in a place is laid at the parson's door, but, bless you! hard words breaks no bones."

"Well, Esther, I can't grudge sparing him for a missionary," said Mary, when Esther paused for breath. "We want our best and cleverest for work like that."

"He's got a good headpiece; old master said

that often enough to me, although he would not say as much to you."

"Did he really like David, do you think?"

"Must ha' done, or he would never have talked about leaving him the farm."

Mary started, and a pink spot showed on either cheek.

"You've got hold of some wrong story, Esther; there was never any question about Mr. David's having the land. How should there be when my husband was the next of kin?"

"Well, it's a queer thing he never told you," said Esther," folding her arms with a snap; "but what you hear with your own ears there's no disbelievin', is there?"

"Did Uncle Peter say as much to you then?" asked Mary, thinking of Abel's words as he had gone out that evening.

"No; he said it to Mr. David, and I heard it. It must have been about a week afore you sailed. I was in the small paddock down yonder seeing after a new brood of chickens, and Master David were trotting by when the old master stopped him, and the boy got off his pony and led him up the drive. Master stood there with his hand upon his shoulder. I can't mind all that was said, but I know the sense of it. He offered to leave him all he had, and to let Master David finish his eddication and all, and after that he was to help him manage the farm, just like his own son might do; but he was never to let one

of the name of Godwin set foot on it, but there! Master David would have none of it. It seemed as if it angered him somehow. He spoke so thick I could not catch all he said; but one sentence I'll remember as long as I'm alive, 'There's not a woman anywhere like Mary, and I would not give her up for a fortune.' Dear, dear! Just think of the lad keeping a quiet tongue for all these years!"

"And I'm not sure you should have told me now, Esther. Go upstairs, will you? I hear one of the children crying."

Mary needed quiet to consider the strange story she had heard.

Her first feeling was one of deep regret that Abel, after all, had only come into the farm by the accident of Uncle Peter's not having destroyed the will which made him heir. She had always accepted the red handkerchief that had waved farewell as a token that all was forgotten and forgiven, and the unaltered will as a tangible proof that her conjecture was right, but now that theory was shattered for ever. He had been willing to dispossess Abel in favour of her own brother—a refinement of revenge that she found it hard to forgive. For a moment her heart was hot with anger against the old man who had tried to separate her from her only brother. Then gentler counsels prevailed, for, after all, the story showed her the depth of David's affection, that not only had he indignantly thrown back the offer in Uncle

Peter's face, but had made open declaration of his love for his sister, a love to which he had remained true all his days.

"Not even Ruby has ousted me," thought Mary, smiling.

And, after all, that decision of David's might have been the turning-point of the boy's life, that first renunciation, perhaps have prepared the way for the final renunciation of body, soul, and spirit to God's work in a far-off land. There was no cause for anger with poor dead Uncle Peter if her brother's noble life was the outcome of the old man's offer, but how well David had kept the secret.

"And he shall keep it always," thought Mary, "and Abel need never know. It would spoil his joy, and it has not spoiled mine for more than a moment, only made me realize more than I ever did before what a fine, true character David has."

Her husband's shadow fell upon the window, and he entered at the door, and, crossing the hall, took his wife's face between his two hands, and turned it up to his.

"Still dreaming of David?" he said.

"Yes, Abel, and oh! I'm so proud of him," she answered simply; "for, truly, I think that, like his namesake, he's a man after God's own heart."

THE END

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